

REPORT TO: Environment and Urban Renewal Policy Performance Board (PPB)

DATE: 15th July 2020

REPORTING OFFICER: Strategic Director – Enterprise, Community and Resources.

PORTFOLIO: Cross-cutting

SUBJECT: Environment and Urban Renewal Priorities Update

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 This report updates the Board on the work undertaken during the Covid pandemic to achieve the Environment and Urban Renewal of the Borough.
- 1.2 For the majority of the Council services relevant to the remit of this Board, 'business as usual' has been the approach. Bins have continued to be emptied, the roads repaired, public spaces have been maintained and cleansed, and decisions have been made on development schemes, with key regeneration projects making progress.

2.0 RECOMMENDED: That

The Board notes the progress made against the relevant Council priorities during lockdown.

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 3.1 When UK lockdown commenced on the 23 March 20 there was a significant amount of uncertainty as to how the pandemic would progress, and the extent of local impacts. With the exception of 'key workers', the population at large was instructed to stay at home and shelter, or in the case of those with underlying health condition to become 'shielded'.
- 3.2 It was imperative that the services relied upon by sheltering and shielded residents, and key workers continued to function. Halton's staff quickly adapted to a new work environment, observing strict health and safety practices, working from home where possible, or continuing front line activities such as highway safety and permit inspections, building control inspections, planning enforcement, waste collection, and many other statutory functions that cannot be done from home.
- 3.3 The following topic based updates are presented to the Board to give a flavour of the work that has continued throughout lockdown:
- 3.4 **Logistics and Transport Management**

3.5 The teams provided a critical role in both the personal protective equipment (PPE) Hub and Shielding Hub, the latter established to deliver food, supplies and medicines to shielded individuals. Measures were put in place to ensure the Council's fleet of vehicles was operational at all times through the pandemic. During March / April in the region of 500 emergency deliveries had been made to 'shielded' individuals. Large quantities of food was collected from supermarkets and a number of large collections of PPE were made by the in-house fleet vehicles. Seven fleet vehicles are now equipped with dividing screens for passenger transport / community meals. Social distancing measures have been installed at Lower House Lane Depot, such as one way systems, stencilling and signage. This has enabled the MOT bay to re-open for taxi testing, and also to the public for servicing and repairs. The team have also supported the re-opening of schools, providing transport for pupils.

3.6 Public Transport:

Important events have included the retail sector re-opening on 15th June and face masks became compulsory on public transport from 15th June. The Council put in place measures to support these, for example:

- Social distancing measures have been put in place at bus stops
- Stencilling intermediate bus stops with 2 metre reminders both on the floor and also on shelters.
- Changes at bus interchanges to separate boarding and alighting passengers, provide the majority of the space available in each of the locations to allow for social distancing for waiting passengers.
- Posters installed to reminding passengers of the social distancing policy and that face coverings must be worn.
- Team in regular contact with the bus operators.
- Following the recent increase in bus services frequency across the Borough, the intention is to withdraw the pre 09.30 travel agreement which has been in place since the start of the lockdown period. The withdrawal will take effect from 1st July 2020. This will fall in line with Cheshire West and Chester who are also members and the administrators of the Cheshire scheme.

3.7 Increase in Bus Services:

Arriva increased services from 1st of June to approximately 73% of pre Covid levels. Service increase from hourly is as follows;

- Arriva re-introduced the X1 (Liverpool) service from Monday 22nd June
- 1 and 2 busway Circular every 12 mins in both directions
- 3a re-introduced to provide 30 minute frequency with 3c Runcorn Shopping City - Weston
- 500 every 30 mins Halton Hospital-Liverpool
- 110 every 30 mins Murdishaw - Warrington
- 61 every 40 mins Murdishaw-Liverpool
- 79c every 30 mins Widnes-Liverpool
- 62 service re-instated on an hourly frequency Murdishaw-Hale Bank
- X30 will remain hourly Chester-Runcorn
- 14a will remain hourly for now Murdishaw-Hough Green

3.8 **Town Planning & Development**

3.9 **Local Plan**

During April, the Planning Inspectorate advised that Hearing Sessions are currently on hold and are not expected to be held until October / November 2020. Details of hearing sessions will be made public 6 weeks before the hearing. Two Inspectors (Caroline Mulloy & David Troy) have been appointed to examine the Halton Local Plan, and the team has been busy responding to questions from the Inspectors as they review the plan and background documents. Members will have received a letter highlighting this information.

3.10 The Council responded to Liverpool John Lennon Airport 'Airspace Change Procedures', lobbying for reduced noise and disturbance for residents whilst accommodating technology and safety improvements at the airport

3.11 **Building / Development Control & Enforcement**

- Building Control continued to visit new housing sites to allow the sale of new homes
- The Waking Watch provision at The Decks was extended to allow critical work on fire alarm systems to be completed and allow residents to stay in their homes during lockdown
- Planning applications processing saw increased productivity due to new ways of working
- Enforcement action is being taken against a group who have commenced a residential use without planning permission in Widnes.
- A planning application was received for homes on Widnes Golf Course and proved to be very controversial locally

3.12 **Road Safety**

The teams have operated 'business as usual', albeit working remotely, providing all normal traffic management services (see points below). On temporary secondment, the Road Safety Coordinators have assisted with the Covid19 sheltering hub. School crossing patrols were stood down temporarily while schools were closed.

- In preparation for the re-opening of the Household Waste Sites (increased queue lengths due to demand and social distancing inside sites) traffic management (TM) measures were put in place
- Identification of possible sites and organising TM arrangements for Covid19 military mobile testing stations at the Heath, Runcorn and Widnes Market.
- Temporary and permanent TM measures at hot spots for leisure walkers to cope with increasing levels of traffic / parking congestion
- Temporary signage / road markings (stencilling) for School Crossing Patrol sites so children / adults waiting to cross can maintain social distancing
- Undertaking scheme design and carrying out Road Safety Audits on proposed walking / cycling measures as space within the adopted highway is reallocated in response to changes in the way people travel. Whilst recognising the urgency of the situation, road safety assessment were undertaken on proposals to ensure the safety of ALL road users.

- Audited signage and other street furniture to remove bottlenecks and pinch-points from existing footways in key areas, to allow social distancing can be more easily maintained.
- Working with schools to ensure adjacent roads are able to cope new arrangements. Identification of measures (such as temporary traffic regulation orders) to ensure as safe an environment as possible can be created for active travel.
- The upgrade to the street works permit system went live, it now shows all future works, as soon as a permit is granted it will show on the map: <https://one.network/custom/halton/>

3.13 **Highways**

3.14 Post-Covid Travel and Active Travel Interventions

During June the Department for Transport (DfT) wrote to the Combined Authority to launch an Active Travel Emergency Fund. Nationally this comprised £250m, with £25m top sliced for cycle repair schemes. The remaining £225m is to be released in two phases, with £45m allocated now, and the remainder in the future. The LCR CA is to receive £1.974 of the national £45m for phase 1, which are schemes to be implemented over July and August. Although no allocation has been announced for Phase 2, schemes are being refined to as to be available when funding is available.

3.15 DfT's letter specified criteria to guide the expenditure of the funds: "swift and meaningful plans to reallocate road space to cyclists and pedestrians, including on strategic corridors", "The quickest and cheapest way...will normally be by point closures. These can be main roads...or of parallel side streets." "Pop up segregated cycle lanes will also be funded but are more difficult to implement quickly." As the guidance states, they must use full or light segregation. "Elaborate, costly materials will not be funded at this stage." "Anything that does not meaningfully alter the status quo on the road will not be funded." Works must start within 4 weeks and be completed within 8 weeks of starting, otherwise monies are clawed back by downward adjustments to payment of future grants. This affects an LA's ability to secure Tranche 2 funding.

3.16 Schemes proposed under Phase 1 are temporary segregated cycle corridors:

- Green Oaks Way, Widnes
- East Lane Runcorn and busway from Halton Hospital to Murdishaw Centre (subject to Operator consultation and Road Safety Audits)

3.17 Local consultation is being undertaken to identify additional desirable active travel routes in Halton via employer and employee consultations and a letter to schools about desirable transport routes. Scheme proposals follow analysis of bus data, transport models and site observations.

3.18 Phase 2 Schemes:

- Review of existing combined footway cycleway on Heath Road in Runcorn, possible segregated cycle route or further widening of footpath. Includes a small section of Clifton Rd to link into existing cycleway infrastructure.

- Acceleration of currently proposed route through Frederick St / Appleton Village to link into Victoria Park. Route from Locket Rd junction up Birchfield Road to Willmere and beyond to St Helens
- Design of Cycle Route to Frodsham from Weston via Cow Hey Lane to support workers travelling to Ineos, Innovyn, Rocksavage Power Station and the Heath Business Park from Sutton Weaver, Frodsham, Helsby and beyond.
- Acceleration of LCWIP programme to complete the busway verge to cycleway schemes around the entire Busway loop.
- Implement a cycle route from Hough Green through Chestnut Lodge towards the Town Centre supporting an area with reliance on buses and deprived.
- Increase routes from the new Astmoor Cycle spine into and across the wider estate.
- Route from Cronton College along Cronton Lane, Lunts Heath Rd to South Lane to enable East West movement through North Widnes and linking into St Helens / Widnes Town Centre route to encourage students away from car usage and towards cycling
- Maximise use of existing infrastructure through vegetation clearance on existing routes, identifying bottlenecks and widen where possible to an ideal 3.5m. Particularly around Southern Expressway routes supporting workers traveling to Whitehouse.
- Develop an on road cycleway along Moor Lane removing one lane to link from the Ditton Rd route from Halewood into the existing Kingsway route that in turn could be developed with physical protection features
- Implement cycle storage at local centres

3.19 Transport for the North (TfN)

TfN contacted the LCR Combined Authority asking for schemes that could be accelerated to help with economic recovery. TfN are putting this forward speculatively to Government, so no money guaranteed. Halton relevant schemes include:

Daresbury Expressway widening scheme, which has been rebranded as East Runcorn Business Corridor.

- LJLA Eastern Access Corridor (CA Scheme)
- Rail Access for All – stations include Widnes and Hough Green
- Universal Traffic Control (UTC) to integrate traffic signals on main routes.

3.20 Major Schemes

3.21 Runcorn Station Quarter

- Construction of the new road layout has reached an advanced stage.
- The redundant approach road to the SJB from Runcorn is completely demolished and there is good visibility of the Waterloo Bridge from the west.
- Grants were secured from the LCR CA and Metro-mayor to part fund the RSQ works and Station Piazza.

- Station Piazza element is progressing, with efforts to secure permissions with Network Rail and Avanti to construct the piazza on their respective land.

3.22 Widnes Loops

- Construction of the new junction on to the Mersey Gateway is progressing, and the outline is now visible on site
- Focus has been on overcoming utility issues (primarily service diversions) with ongoing dialogue with United Utilities and Scottish Power. A 'service corridor' has been created along the eastern edge of Victoria Road, so that all utilities (previously running all over, hence the delays) are in one narrow area.

3.23 Silver Jubilee Bridge

- The contractor, Balvac, is continuing works to reconfigure SJB for vehicles and cycles, as well as the installation of a new parapet support structure on Runcorn Approach Viaduct (RAV) East, that is now required due to the demolition of the RAV West (which carried traffic using the demolished trumpet loop).
- HBC have undertaken to remove pigeon exclusion netting from the structures within the SJB complex. This applies to the Runcorn side only (netting had not been installed on the Widnes approach structures).

3.24 Miscellaneous

- Rollout commenced of 29 on-street electric vehicle charging points for residents. In conjunction with Connected Kerb Ltd this scheme is Government grant funded by OLEV.
- Liverpool Road, Widnes resurfacing scheme designed and started 18 May
- Flood risk management scheme application submitted to the Environment Agency for funding for a scheme at Bridgeway / Lockgate at Windmill Hill, Runcorn to manage surface water & runoff. Under the Flood and Water Management Act 2010, HBC is designated as Lead Local Flood Authority. In HBC's Surface Water Management Plan (SWMP) a total of 15 hotspot areas were identified and Bridgeway and Lockgate was ranked highest for the number of households at risk.

3.25 Regeneration

3.26 Future High Streets Fund

- Draft bid submitted 16 March 2020, with final business case to be submitted no later than 31st July.
- HBC's consultants 'WSP' have been commissioned to prepare feasibility study for boatlift and associated infrastructure west of Waterloo Bridge, in partnership with 'Unlock Runcorn'.

3.27 Runcorn Town Deal

- Last meeting of Town Deal Board held in February 2020, with March and April meetings cancelled. A meeting has been scheduled for 9th July
- Government has produced guidance for how they would like to see proposals for town deal funding being presented. Government is providing some technical advice to support bid submissions.
- Government has now advised local authorities that, due to the virus, there will be three opportunities to submit bids: by July 2020, or October 2020, or January 2021. Given that Halton will be awaiting the outcome of its Future High Streets Fund bid in the autumn, it seems sensible to submit in January 2021.

3.28 Ditton Corridor

- Housing on the former Stobart/Tarmac (Halebank) site – the masterplan is currently being finalised and site clearance/investigation is on schedule. Support is being sought from Homes England for funding of the scheme
- Wider project area - Initial master planning (including detailed Flood Risk analysis) underway & on schedule. Land assembly plans are on schedule.

3.29 Open Space Service

3.30 Throughout the Covid-19 lockdown the Service has been operational and undertaking public duties. Throughout the pandemic the government has made it clear that public parks must remain open (although facilities such as children's play areas, Multi Use Games Areas, skate parks and bowling greens had to close). Initially parks were to be used by the public for one period of daily exercise per person but then restrictions were eased and some facilities were able to reopen. The result has been very high visitor numbers to all of our major parks and higher levels of use at our smaller neighbourhood parks and open spaces. This has had a big impact on the service. In particular emptying bins that are constantly being filled has proved to be very challenging. However the service has managed to maintain the Borough's public parks to a high standard, and all of the planned maintenance activities have taken place throughout the emergency period.

3.31 The functions of the Street Scene service include the horticultural maintenance and the street cleansing activities of neighbourhood areas, town centres and the major highway network. The period in which people were only allowed out for exercise once per day and close to home led to a big increase in the use of the street litter bins, but within the town centres there was a big decrease, requiring adjustments to be made to service provision. Grass cutting on the major highways was suspended in March, as was mechanical sweeping. The fortnightly emptying of street litter bins in neighbourhood areas went to weekly in order to cope with the situation. The grass cutting on the major highway network and the mechanical sweeping recommenced in June. Street litter bin collections have now reverted to fortnightly. Throughout the emergency period grass cutting was carried out as per the schedule.

3.32 Cemeteries and Crematoria

3.33 The Cemeteries and Crematorium section has been extremely busy throughout the covid-19 emergency. The numbers of cremations carried out to date are almost equal to what would be done in a full year. Extra resources were drafted into the section so that additional burial and cremation slots could be offered. As numbers within the crematorium chapel had to be reduced to only 12, free webcasting of funerals was granted and large numbers have taken up that option. A temporary portable cremator was sourced during the emergency period and it was installed in mid-June. The temporary portable cremator has been put into place in order to guarantee that the service can cope with any increase in capacity requirements. As the existing cremators have been worked to their limits, major servicing will need to be carried out very soon and the temporary mobile cremator will assist with this. The Open Space service also facilitated the setting up of, and the running of, a temporary body storage facility at the Silver Blades ice rink in Widnes. Staff from the division constructed the actual facility and managed its operation (with staff from other service areas being drafted in to assist). That facility has now been de-constructed and the ice rink has been handed back to its owners. Work on the new cemetery at Peel House continued throughout the emergency period, and although not yet open to the public, the new cemetery is ready for burials.

3.34 During the emergency period staff from other areas of the Council have been drafted into the Open Space Service to help to keep front line operations going.

3.35 **Waste and Recycling Operations**

3.36 Since the start of the COVID-19 emergency waste management operations have continued as normal. All general waste, recycling, garden waste and bulky household items collections were carried out as scheduled.

3.37 As a result of many people spending more time at home than normal, which increased the likelihood of more waste being generated by each household, our 'no side waste' Policy was relaxed which saw all waste presented for collection being removed. This significantly increased the workload for collection crews and the tonnages of waste collected, but nonetheless, all collections were completed on a daily basis.

3.38 **Household Waste Recycling Centres**

3.39 Following their initial closure in March, the Council's Household Waste Recycling Centres were reopened on Monday 4th May. Since reopening, the centres have operated within strict guidelines to ensure that social distancing rules can be adhered to. This included a restriction on the number of cars allowed on site at any one time. These restrictions impacted upon queuing times and necessitated the implementation of Traffic Management plans at both sites. Traffic Marshalling arrangements were also required to be put in place for a number of weeks at the Johnson's Lane site due to heavy HGV traffic movements from nearby industrial premises. Although both sites remain busy, and there are still lengthy waiting times on occasions, such waiting times have

reduced considerably from the early weeks of reopening when cars were queuing for up to 3 hours.

3.40 Access to the Council's HWRCs was also limited to cars only, with no vans or large trailers being allowed entry. This was due to them usually carrying much larger volumes of waste than cars, meaning longer unloading times, with subsequent impact upon queuing times. The restriction on vans and large trailers is currently under review and Officers are currently exploring options for enabling this restriction to be lifted.

3.41 Environmental Improvement Services

3.42 The fly-tipping removal and environmental nuisance cleaning operations continued as normal through the COVID-19 emergency. However, the situation did impact upon the Council's environmental enforcement activities but plans are being made for such activity to now be increased.

4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

4.1 The work reported above makes progress against the suite of environment and urban renewal policies, as set out in the Corporate Plan and subordinate plans and strategies, for example the Local Plan and Local Transport Plan.

5.0 OTHER IMPLICATIONS

5.1 None.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

6.1 The purpose of this report is to update the Board on work undertaken to further the Council's environment and urban renewal priorities during Covid lockdown. Good transport networks, clean public spaces, and active development and regeneration are all fundamental to economic recovery, increasing employment, and sustainable communities.

7.0 RISK ANALYSIS

7.1 N/A

8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

8.1 There are no Equality and Diversity implications arising as a result of the proposed.

9.0 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

9.1 None.