

REPORT TO: Environment and Urban Renewal
Policy and Performance Board

DATE: 22 September 2021

REPORTING OFFICER: Strategic Director Enterprise, Community &
Resources

SUBJECT: Annual Report

PORTFOLIO: Environment and Urban Renewal

WARDS: All

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 To provide the Board with an annual summary of its work for the period 2020-21.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That the Annual Report contained in Appendix 1 is welcomed and endorsed.

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 3.1 The primary function of the Environment and Urban Renewal Policy and Performance Board (EUR PPB) is to focus on the work of the Council (and its partners) in securing environmental improvements and urban regeneration.
- 3.2 During the 2020/21 Municipal Year, the Board met on four occasions and considered a number of reports, covering a diverse range of subjects pertinent to the Board's remit.
- 3.3 The PPB also received regular updates on service performance targets.

4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The Board has reviewed and recommended a substantial amount of policy changes across a range of topics in 2020/21. These policy areas are set out in Appendix 1.

5.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 None at this stage.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

6.1 Children and Young People in Halton

The work of the PPB supports future generations in Halton by ensuring a clean and safe environment.

6.2 Employment, Learning and Skills in Halton

This PPB supports the infrastructure in Halton that helps with job creation and sustainable transport links to employment.

6.3 A Healthy Halton

The work of the PPB contributes towards a less polluted environment and helps to create a green infrastructure.

6.4 A Safer Halton

The PPB supports designing out crime and developing safer communities.

6.5 Halton's Urban Renewal

This PPB scrutinised the work undertaken in bringing forward regeneration projects.

7.0 RISK ANALYSIS

N/A

8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

N/A

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

None within the meaning of the Act

APPENDIX 1: ANNUAL REPORT 2020 - 21

FOREWORD

"The role and remit of the PPB is wide ranging and we have covered a variety of specialist themes and topics during the last 12 months. I hope that the short summary outlined in this annual report adequately reflects this.

I am grateful, as always, to PPB Members for their continued support and valuable contributions at our meetings. The quality of the discussions is always impressive, giving the PPB a vital role in informing and improving the Council's policies and procedures, and ensuring value for money in the delivery of the services provided to Halton's residents and businesses.

Despite the Covid pandemic, the Council has delivered major schemes, such as the demolition of the Silver Jubilee Bridge road viaducts and Trumpet Loop, the new road access to Runcorn Station, the construction of the John Collins Way junction into West Bank, and several new cycling and walking schemes. The emerging Local Plan has advanced to examination, setting out a new 15-year vision for protecting Halton's environment and accommodating the growth our communities need. These are challenging projects at the best of times, but given the trials of 2020, performance has been exceptional. I am proud the Board has shaped and championed these projects.

Councillor Bill Woolfall

Chair, Environment and Urban Renewal Policy and Performance Board

ENVIRONMENT AND URBAN RENEWAL PPB ANNUAL REPORT 2020 - 2021

MEMBERSHIP AND RESPONSIBILITIES

During 2020-2021 the Board comprised eleven Councillors:-
Councillor Bill Woolfall (Chairman)

Councillor Mike Fry (Vice-Chairman)
Councillor Harry Howard
Councillor Alan Lowe
Councillor Keith Morley
Councillor Paul Nolan
Councillor Joe Roberts
Councillor Pauline Sinnott
Councillor Angela Teeling
Councillor Robert Gilligan
Councillor Christopher Rowe

The primary function of the Environment and Urban Renewal Policy and Performance Board (EUR PPB) is to focus on enhancing the local environment and championing the urban renewal / regeneration of Halton. The Board reviews Executive Board decisions relevant to its remit, and monitors the general activities and performance of Council departments against service plans.

The Board scrutinises performance and formulates policy in relation to the following areas:

- Highways, Transportation and Logistics (including road maintenance, street, lighting, road safety, traffic management, supported bus services and flood risk management)
- Landscape Services, Parks & Countryside, Cemeteries & Crematoria
- Environmental and Regulatory Services
- Major Projects
- Economic Regeneration and Business Development
- Waste Management and Waste Strategy
- Derelict and contaminated Land
- Housing Strategic Policy
- Sustainability, Climate Change and Biodiversity
- Physical Environment and Planning policies

REVIEW OF THE YEAR

The Board met 4 times during the Municipal Year 2020/21:

- 15 July 2020
- 30 September 2020
- 2 December 2020
- 24 February 2021

Some of the main activities and issues that have come before the Board during the year are set out below.

PRIORITIES UPDATE & COVID IMPACTS

The Board reviewed the work undertaken during the COVID 19 pandemic. Council services, relevant to environment and urban renewal priorities, continued throughout the lockdown periods; this included refuse collections, repairs to roads, maintenance of public open spaces, and progress on key regeneration projects. Staff ensured continuity of services and worked closely with contractors to continue projects, for example the demolition of the Silver Jubilee Bridge road viaducts and the Trumpet Loop. Considerable progress was made on these key projects despite the pandemic.

ENVIRONMENT

- **Environmental Fund Update**

The fund has been in operation since 2015, and over that period has generated £3,471,740 for expenditure in Halton. A significant number of projects have received funding. Examples include improvements to open spaces across the Borough, the implementation of walking and cycling routes, pond improvements, enhancing play areas, dealing with fly tipping, refurbishment of War Memorials, and CCTV monitoring.
- **Implications of the Environment Bill**

The Board heard how the Environment Bill would set the new environmental governance framework as the UK leaves the EU. The Bill sets out new environmental frameworks including:

 - Setting legally binding environmental targets, with environmental improvement plans and a requirement for monitoring;
 - Setting out policy statements on environmental principles;
 - Establishes the Office for Environmental Protection and its legal powers;
 - Creates legislation around waste, air quality and water quality;
 - Sets the requirement for Biodiversity Net Gain to be a condition of planning permission;
 - Establishes the mechanism for Conservation Covenants in relation to Biodiversity Net Gain;
 - The preparation of Local Nature Recovery Strategies and Nature Recovery Networks to direct offsite Biodiversity Net Gain provision;
 - The preparation of Species Conservation Strategies and Protected Site Strategies;
 - Controlling of felling of trees; and
 - Regulation of chemicals.

The Board resolved to keep the Bill under review as it passes through Parliamentary process.

- **Tackling Flyposting**

Fly posting is illegal and is unfair on those companies who chose to advertise legitimately. Fly posting also put an additional cost on the Local Authority and other landowners who had to remove fly posters. It also had a severe effect on the local environmental quality of the Borough and could act as an anti-social magnet that encouraged a social downward spiral and could lead to an increase in resident's fear of crime. The Board considered further options for tackling flyposting.

URBAN RENEWAL

- Halton Lea – Liverpool City Region Town Centre Fund
The Board received an update on the ongoing work at Halton Lea. In 2018, the Metro Mayor announced a £1m Town Centre Fund allocation for each of the Liverpool City local authority. The purpose of the fund is to stimulate plans for Town Centres that will generate a long term sustainable approach to revitalising the high street. The objectives of the fund are:-
 - Place making & place renewal
 - Increased Footfall
 - Sustainable vitality of town centre
 - Job Opportunities

An action plan for Halton Lea Town Centre Fund was agreed with the Combined Authority in February 2020, initially for delivery by the end of the calendar year however, the programme has been extended to 31st October 2021. The programme has nine projects and generates £601,875 of match funding in addition to the £1m. There are nine work streams for Halton Lea Town Centre Fund:

- Relocation of Halton Hospital Services
- Third Sector Hub
- Roof Top Garden
- Culture HA
- Improved wayfinding
- Wellbeing hub
- Community Shop
- 'The Box' Grants
- Third Sector Grants

TRANSPORT

A key statutory duty of the Council is ensuring that the local transport network is well maintained, safe, and efficient for all users and is adapting to respond to the climate emergency.

- Active Travel Investment
The Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) is a non-statutory document that aims to provide the context to prioritise a list of walking and cycling routes to be created or improved. The LCWIP supports a number of Transport Strategies from the Local Transport Plan 3, and the LCR's Local Journeys Strategy. It addresses the climate change agenda by providing and promoting clean and low carbon transport systems. Routes aim to enable

people to connect easily with employment, services and social activities and providing opportunity to improve the health and well-being of the people who live and work in the borough. The Board reviewed two new LCWIP routes:

- LCWIP Phase 2 (Runcorn to Daresbury)
- LCWIP Phase 3 (Runcorn Busway - Halton Lea to Murdishaw)

- Disabled Parking Spaces Policy

The Board considered updates to the disabled person's parking spaces policy. On-street advisory disabled parking spaces have been provided free of charge for the previous 15 years, subject to the applicant meeting certain criteria. Over this period more than 600 Halton residents have applied for a disabled person's parking space, with more than 60% being approved. Changes in how mobility allowances are defined and awarded, increasing levels of on-street parking congestion, and a lack of explicit guidance and qualifying criteria, all suggest the current process required review. Changes to the application process have now improved the process and clarity for eligible residents.

- Annual Road Traffic Collision and Accident Report

The Board considered a report that set out full details of the numbers of road traffic collision and casualty numbers in the year 2019, and recommended a continuance of road safety programme for 2021. The Board welcomed the reduction in casualty numbers in recent years, with Halton recognised as one of the best performing, both regionally and nationally. Encouragingly, both collision numbers and Child KSIs are at an all-time low and the long-term trends for all casualty types are generally downward.

- Roadside Memorial Policy

The Board considered the creation of a roadside memorials policy. A number of authorities had started to establish a policy and protocol relating to the placement and removal of roadside floral tributes and other memorials placed at the scene of fatalities on or adjacent to the highway. Adopted policies generally set a defined period for the placement of flowers and other tributes and include protocols and arrangements for their removal and the return of non-perishable items to relatives, while recognising the sensitive and emotional nature of this topic. The Council had a legal duty to ensure that highways were fit for purpose and to make sure that public open spaces were free from debris. The Board supported the creation of such a policy and felt a joint policy with Cheshire Constabulary and the Liverpool City Region would be a good option.

- Problem Pavement Parking

Prompted by the DfT consultation on nuisance parking, the Board considered it timely to look again at pavement parking in the Halton. A Working Party was established to review the current position and issues associated with pavement parking in Halton. The Working Party met virtually on 3rd February and considered the legislative framework for parking enforcement and tackling highway obstruction. The WP also debated the merits and likely consequences of the DfT consultation, before moving on to discuss the areas of the Borough where pavement parking problems have been reported. The Working Party recommended the following actions:

- Recommend the Board endorse a decision not to seek Civil Parking Enforcement powers at the present time.
- Write to the Police and Crime Commissioner requesting their continued support in taking targeted enforcement action where pavement parking presents an ongoing problem.
- Produce a draft policy to tackle parking on the Council's verges.

TOWN PLANNING

Central Government changed, or proposed to change, a considerable amount of town planning legislation in 2020. As a result, the Board received reports covering:

- Revisions to the Use Class Order

The Board received a briefing on changes to national planning regulations that will remove, in many circumstances, the need for planning permission where a 'change of use' is involved. Central government's intent is make it easier for high street uses to adapt and change according to local circumstances without a planning application. The Board had concerns that the consequences of these changes is the removal of local input and control over development.
- General Changes to the Planning System

The Board received an update on a Government consultation on the current planning system and the potential implications this could have for development in Halton. The Ministries of Housing, Communities and Local Government was consulting on shorter term changes to planning policy and regulations in addition to the more fundamental reform to the planning system as set out in the Planning for the Future White Paper. The Government had set out proposals to improve the effectiveness of the current planning system. These covered:

 - The standard method for assessing housing for local plans;
 - Delivering first homes;
 - S106 and small site – to temporarily increase the threshold below which developers do not need to contribute to affordable housing to up to 40 to 50 units for an 18 month period; and
 - Proposals to increase the threshold for Permission in Principle by application.
- Planning White Paper - Consultation

The White Paper was published on 6th August 2020 and was trailed as the most radical reform of the planning system in England since the establishment of the current system. The key driver of the proposed reforms was the need to deliver, as a nation, 300,000 new homes per year. The proposals were set out under a number of pillars with each having a number of specific proposals. The pillars for change were: Planning for development; Planning for beautiful and sustainable places; and Planning for infrastructure and connected places. The Board discussed each of the 24 detailed proposals as detailed in the White Paper. Concerns were expressed regarding the protection of community green spaces and outdoor sporting facilities and the Board considered these concerns should form part of the Council response to the consultation.

- Changes to National Permitted Development Rights
The Board was provided with an update on imminent changes to planning regulations which will allow certain forms of development to be undertaken without planning permission.

Local planning policy was also considered:

- Unitary Development Plan – Draft Supplementary Planning Documents
The Board recommended that four draft Supplementary Planning Documents (SPD) should be formally removed from the Local Development Scheme (LDS). These were SPD's for:
 - Draft Runcorn Old Town;
 - Halton Lea;
 - West Bank; and
 - Halebank Regeneration Area.

It was noted that the draft SPD's associated with the Unitary Development Plan would expire alongside their parent UDP policies, once the Delivery and Allocations Local Plan was adopted. The Board seeks to ensure that Halton's planning policy framework is up-to-date and fit for purpose.

- Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) Local Plan Addendum
The Board was advised that the Government had introduced new legislation to help deal with governance issues during the COVID-19 pandemic. This included the Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure, Listed Buildings and Environmental Impact Assessment) (England) (Coronavirus) (Amendment) Regulations 2020. These new regulations provided for the temporary suspension (until 31st December 2020) of certain planning consultation procedures where they may conflict with COVID-19 public health priorities.

DURING 2021/22 THE BOARD PLANS TO FOCUS ON:

- Supporting recovery plans in response to Covid-19
- Considering long term budget requirements for the delivery of services
- Environmental enhancements
- Supporting an inclusive wellbeing economy through regeneration
- Improving performance indicators with negative trends.

Contact Officer for the Board

Members of the public are welcome at the meetings of the Board. If you would like to know where and when meetings are to be held or if you would like any more information about the Board or its work please contact Tim Gibbs, Operational Director 0151 511 7664.