

Welcome to the spring 2021 edition of Insite. This is Sandwell Council's digital magazine focusing on regeneration and growth in our borough and I'm keen for it to serve two main purposes:

- To share information about (and celebrate) projects and progress in Sandwell
- To strengthen links between Sandwell Council and our business community, by conveying what we do in different departments and flagging up opportunities for businesses to work with us.

Strong communication is more important than ever as we emerge from the coronavirus pandemic and look to build an even brighter future for Sandwell.

Read on for good news about restoration work resuming in the historic parkland of West Smethwick Park (page 6), and two new schemes to address fuel poverty in Sandwell (page 5).

Congratulations are due to Urban Design and Building Services, Sandwell Council's specialist design and maintenance team, for retaining and exceeding its Customer Service Excellence standard in a January assessment (page 4). And in the following pages you will also find updates from the Sandwell Business Ambassadors, plus details of how our business support platform Think Sandwell can give you a boost.

If you would like to feed back on any of the information shared in this Insite, or suggest content for future editions, you can contact my team via think_sandwell@sandwell.gov.uk

*Tammy Stokes
Interim Director of Regeneration & Growth
Sandwell Council*



Launching a repair and maintenance framework



Sandwell Property Care has launched its latest repair and maintenance framework, which can be used by the council to procure mechanical, electrical and building works for any publicly funded non-housing project.

This is one of a suite of OJEU-compliant [Official Journal of the European Union] frameworks under the Constructing West Midlands umbrella.

Designed to make the procurement process as efficient and cost-effective as possible, the framework is operated by Urban Design and Building Services (UDBS), a specialist design and maintenance team within Sandwell Council.

The framework's newly appointed contractor partners, Dodd Group and Graham, were appointed following a robust tender and due-diligence process, carried out in accordance with Public Contracts Regulations 2015 and industry best practice standard PAS91/SQ.

Tammy Stokes, Sandwell Council's Interim Director of Regeneration and Growth, said: "As a publicly owned and managed framework, Sandwell Council is committed to providing our clients with access to a cost-effective procurement process, impartial advice and leading contractors who have a proven track record in the delivery of public sector projects."

You can get more information on the framework by emailing the UDBS team at udbs_customercontact@sandwell.gov.uk or by completing the 'Quick Enquiry' form on their website (www.udbs.co.uk/contact.html).



working in partnership with



Breathing a new lease of life into Toll House



The iconic Toll House in Smethwick has been restored by its current owner in close consultation with Sandwell Council's Conservation Officer.

Smethwick's two-storey Toll House was built in around 1820 and became grade II listed in 1973. The stuccoed brick building, along with the adjacent coach house, stands on what was originally the Birmingham, Wolverhampton and Dudley turnpike, which formed in 1760. This is now Smethwick High Street, with Tollhouse Way to the rear.

The property was most recently let as an art gallery and studio, with the coach house used for glass making. The property became vacant in August 2009. In February 2018 Sandwell Council took the lot to auction at Aston Villa FC in Birmingham with SDL Bigwood auctioneers. The guide sale price was between £44,000 and £48,000, reflecting the condition of the property and additional constraints and costs associated with restoring or converting listed buildings. It sold for £215,000.

A schedule of works was imposed to ensure that the building would be restored into a good state of repair prior to its sale. The purchaser, in

close consultation with the council's Conservation Officer, has, to date, made Toll House wind and water-tight, replaced the lead, and managed to salvage and repair the majority of sash windows to maintain the building's character. The electrics have been upgraded and all internal walls replastered; the wrought iron fencing has been repaired and the building has been redecorated throughout. Consistent with its nature, lime render has been used on the façade with no less than four coats of mineral paint applied.

The property is currently being marketed by the owner and, given its prominent position on Smethwick High Street, it could be used, subject to planning, for a variety of retail or professional trades.



Retaining our Customer Service Excellence rating



The Urban Design and Building Services team has not only maintained its Customer Service Excellence standard, but achieved ‘Compliance Plus’ status in two assessing criteria.

Following our full three-year virtual assessment over two days in January, the Urban Design and Building Services team is delighted to confirm that we maintained the Customer Service Excellence standard and achieved Compliance Plus in:

- Criterion 1: Customer Insight for the Virtual Launch of the Repairs and Maintenance Service
- Criterion 3: Information and Access for the Harvest Road 3D Walkthrough.

This means the assessor feels we have gone above and beyond what would normally be expected.

Quote from assessor:

“Urban Design and Building Services is an extremely effective, efficient and forward-thinking team that has embraced customer

service as a very tangible concept. They have used the Customer Service Excellence certification as a working tool for growth and development”.

If you would like to help shape the services we provide via Urban Design and Building Services, by being part of our next Customer

Group, please email your interest to UDBS_customercontact@sandwell.gov.uk

For more information on the Customer Excellence Standard visit

<https://www.customerserviceexcellence.uk.com/>



Resuming restoration work at West Smethwick Park



There is good news for the Lottery-funded restoration scheme of West Smethwick Park, as contractors start back on site.

Having been donated to society in 1895 by James Timmins Chance, of Chance Brothers Glassworks in Smethwick, West Smethwick Park is an important part of our borough's heritage.

The project to restore it was awarded £4.5m from the Heritage Lottery Fund and Big Lottery Fund under the Parks for People programme.

Plans include:

- A split-level community pavilion to replace the original refreshment rooms lost in the 1980s, bringing a community focus back into the centre of the park. The pavilion will accommodate a cafe, meeting area, toilets, exhibition space and a large studio for dance or exercise
- An outdoor events area, surrounded by trees, grass terracing and colourful shrub planting, directly accessible from the lower ground floor of the building. The whole area will be flood-lit for evening performances



- The restoration of the park's historic features, including the grade II-listed James Chance Memorial, the Chance Drinking Fountain, the Airmen's Memorial and entrances at West Park Road and Victoria Road
- Pool edge improvements, tree & shrub planting, footpath restoration, new park furniture, lighting and fitness equipment.

All works will be managed by Urban Design and Building Services, with a programmed completion date of early 2022.

For further information about this development please contact:

UDBS_customercontact@sandwell.gov.uk

Marking a major milestone for Sandwell Aquatics Centre



The development of the Sandwell Aquatics Centre in Smethwick has reached another significant milestone, with the completion of the dive tower.

The 10m tower will be used for the diving competition at the Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games. Its overall structure is 12m high and includes 31 separate English-made, concrete pieces weighing 233 tonnes in total. It took five people 2000 hours to build.

The Sandwell Aquatics Centre will host swimming and para swimming at the Commonwealth Games from 29 July to 3 August 2022, and the diving competition from 4 August to 8 August.

The £73m project is being funded by several partners. Sandwell Council is contributing £27m, with £38.5m coming from the overall Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games budget. A further £7.6m is funded by other external partners Sport England, Black Country LEP,

Sandwell Leisure Trust and the University of Wolverhampton.

To get regular updates on venues, the sports programme and ticketing for the Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games, sign up at www.birmingham2022.com



Addressing fuel poverty in Sandwell

Fuel poverty is a problem in Sandwell, affecting around 17 per cent of households. This is higher than average for the West Midlands and nationally. The Spatial Planning team explains two ways it is being addressed in the borough.

Fuel poverty is measured in England using the low income/high cost definition, which states that a household is in fuel poverty if:

- Its income is below the poverty line
- and
- Its energy costs are higher than is typical for the household type.

This definition is difficult to pin down in data, and the word 'poverty' can mean different things to different people. Nevertheless, fuel poverty levels in Sandwell have been consistent for many years.

The good news is that we now have two schemes designed to help turn things around.

The Local Energy Advice Partnership (LEAP) has now been running for more than a year in conjunction with AgilityEco (<https://applyforleap.org.uk/>). Aimed at all tenures, the advice service is provided at no cost to both Sandwell Council and residents. It provides energy advice and installation of basic energy-saving measures such as LED light bulbs, radiator foil and draught-proofing for those who qualify. In addition, it helps

residents to make sure they are receiving maximum benefits entitlement.

To date, during the current financial year alone, the LEAP scheme has helped over 450 households in Sandwell, with projected energy bill savings of £208,500 over ten years and income maximisation of over £120,000 per year.

Meanwhile, our own ECO3 scheme (http://www.sandwell.gov.uk/info/200190/consumer_advice/4282/eco3) is aimed at the private sector with eligibility subject to strict criteria. In many cases energy-saving measures such as loft and cavity wall insulation can be provided for free. Other measures, such as boiler replacement and internal/external wall insulation usually require partial funding from the householder. Funding is accessed by contractors via the larger energy companies under what is known as the Energy Companies Obligation, or ECO.

Since its inception in October 2018, Sandwell Council has assisted over 1200 households under this scheme.



Celebrating our borough's businesses in the Express & Star



In early February, Think Sandwell was involved in a special Express & Star supplement, highlighting the amazing efforts of Sandwell businesses to survive and thrive through the coronavirus pandemic.

Our commercial feature in the newspaper's 'Regeneration: West Midlands' supplement celebrated Sandwell businesses' 'heroic response' to the challenges brought about by Covid-19. We shared examples of businesses adapting their services to meet the demands of the pandemic, and showed how Sandwell Council supported them with business rates relief and the administration of grants.

The feature also looked forward to brighter days. Other schemes mentioned in our section

of the supplement included Towns Fund developments in Rowley Regis, Smethwick and West Bromwich, the redevelopment of West Bromwich and Wednesbury town centres, the construction of the Sandwell Aquatics Centre and Midlands Metropolitan Hospital, and the Sandwell Skills Strategy.

Follow [@ThinkSandwell](https://twitter.com/ThinkSandwell) on Twitter for good news in Sandwell, and valuable opportunities for our business community.

Giving positive PR with #MadeInSandwell Monday



While the pandemic continues to affect every area of our lives, the Think Sandwell team believes it's more important than ever for Sandwell organisations to share their good news alongside the challenges.

We're keen to hear from Sandwell businesses about their achievements, acquisitions, new recruits, product or service launches, awards, boosts, or forays into new markets. If suitable, we'd love to feature them on our Think Sandwell news page and through our Twitter feed.

Maybe you'd like to star in our popular #MadeInSandwell Monday slot? Since early 2017 we've published a profile of a different Sandwell organisation almost every Monday morning, sharing its history and successes and reasons for investing in Sandwell. While the 'Made' of #MadeInSandwell reflects

our borough's rich manufacturing heritage, it's important to note that we feature any organisation whose story and success have been shaped by our borough. The past few weeks have seen profiles of a locker company, a pioneering engineering firm, a catering outfit, and an online bookshop whose owners would love to open a shop on Wednesbury high street

We're also keen to write about Sandwell Council departments, giving our business community a stronger grasp on what we do here at the council – perhaps by sharing the answers to your FAQs or dispelling myths about your work.

Our articles are written by professional writers to the highest standard. We know of an engineering company in Cradley Heath that keeps its Think Sandwell stories in frames on the wall.

Email think_sandwell@sandwell.gov.uk with the subject line 'Sandwell story' and we'll let you know the next steps.



Winning a £67.5m regeneration boost



Sandwell's bids to the government's Towns Fund have been successful, with our borough on course to receive £67.5m for Rowley Regis, Smethwick and West Bromwich.

The bids were granted in the latest government Budget, meaning Rowley Regis is set to be allocated £19m, Smethwick £23.5m and West Bromwich £25m.

The investment, which is subject to submission and approval of full business cases, will fund a wide range of projects.

The three areas – Rowley Regis (including parts of Oldbury), Smethwick and West Bromwich – were specifically selected by central government to bid for funding. It's worth noting that Sandwell Council continually seeks investment and funding across our borough.

The objective of the Towns Fund is to drive the economic regeneration in towns to deliver long-term economic and productive growth through:

- Urban regeneration, planning and land use
- Skills and enterprise infrastructure
- Connectivity.

Jude Thompson, independent chair of the Superboard set up to develop Towns Fund bids for Sandwell, said he was delighted.

“The bids have been the result of partnership work across business, community and public sector. This announcement will help us move forward and develop the projects further.”

Work has already begun on £2.25m-worth of projects in these areas following a successful bid to the Accelerated Towns Fund programme last year.

Visit the council's [Towns Fund](#) webpage for details of specific projects being proposed for the Towns Fund programme in Sandwell.

Welcoming four new Sandwell Business Ambassadors

Welcome to our new Sandwell Business Ambassadors



#DoingBusinessBetter

Four inspirational people have joined the Sandwell Business Ambassadors – a collective of leaders dedicated to representing our business community.

Anjali Agrawal is a chartered accountant and CEO of CMT Engineering, based in Cradley Heath. She grew up in India, studied in London, and has also lived in Nigeria and the USA, so can contribute a very international perspective to business in the region.

Anjali said: "People in the Black Country region are especially great to work with: down to earth, with a lot of common sense, honest and hard working. Since relocating from America and acquiring this business, I have received a lot of support locally. Being a Sandwell Business Ambassador is my chance to give back to the Sandwell borough and promote economic growth in our area."

Bringing a legal perspective is Gurpreet Bhatia, who specialises in commercial and residential property and private immigration cases. He is a partner at Harbans Singh & Co Solicitors, a legal firm with offices in Oldbury and Handsworth. Having lived in Sandwell for most of his life, Gurpreet is passionate about supporting local people to reach their potential.

Gurpreet said: "The people of Sandwell are the borough's greatest strength and serving them gives me a tremendous sense of fulfilment. I want to amplify the voices of individuals and the business community, to promote inclusion and opportunities for all. I believe these are key to nurturing economic growth in the area and achieving greater prosperity for all Sandwell residents."

Jan Denning has over 30 years' experience in travel, tourism and hospitality. She is director of The Hospitality Partnership and managing director of Destination Wolverhampton and The Black Country, two organisations

working to promote the hospitality sector and attract more visitors to the region.

Jan said: "It's a sector that I absolutely love and have been involved with throughout my working life. On a national scale, it contributes over £106 billion to the UK economy, so it should be a key focus here too. Sandwell has huge potential, and I'm excited to be collaborating with Business Ambassadors from other sectors to benefit Sandwell and the wider Black Country."

Last but not least, Paul Haywood brings a logistical focus to the Sandwell Business Ambassadors. As managing director of family firm Lift Craft Ltd in Oldbury, he simultaneously oversees projects, people, quality control and systems, constantly trying to find ways to do things better in an environment where no two days are the same.

Paul said: "I grew up and trained in Sandwell, and became a Sandwell Business Ambassador to support our business community and bring jobs to the area. People here are reliable, kind and honest. We work in an exceptional part of the country and I am keen to work with the other Sandwell Business Ambassadors to help it flourish."

The new Ambassadors will be using their knowledge and experience to help Sandwell Council identify the needs of the local business community, inform council policy, support the economic growth of the region and promote initiatives such as the Inclusive Economy Deal and the drive to buy and hire locally.

For more information visit

www.sandwellbusinessambassadors.co.uk

Sharing business and regeneration news from the borough

Sign up for the email newsletter.

The Think Sandwell team is responsible for Sandwell Council's email newsletter relating to business and regeneration in the borough. We'd love to keep you in the loop. When you sign up for Sandwell Council email updates at <https://www.sandwell.gov.uk/emailupdates> simply make sure you check the box for 'Business and regeneration news' in your list of subscriber preferences. You'll get regular round-ups of our news stories, including signposts to grant funding, training opportunities and more.

If you have any questions, email think_sandwell@sandwell.gov.uk.



Share your
Sandwell
business
stories

think
Sandwell

Serving people directly on planning and building matters

The Planning and Building Control team explains how its frontline customer service team directly supports members of the public, professional bodies and council colleagues.

Our customer-facing team consists of four advisers who provide support and advice on development planning management and building consultancy issues.

They do this either by phone or – in 'normal' times – face to face in the One Stop Shop (in the reception area of Council House in Oldbury).

They can help with:

- General Planning and Building Regulation enquiries
- Application submission and progress
- Fees
- Provision of location plans
- Technical advice
- Booking of site inspections.



We have been proud to adapt our delivery during the coronavirus pandemic, maintaining our customer advice service even while working from home. Our customers have been grateful for this continued service and for their applications being processed as normal during these unprecedented times.

You can contact our advisers directly via **0121 569 4054/4055/4084**.

During the pandemic, we have seen increased demand for advice on:

- Domestic alterations/extensions
- Garage conversions
- Outbuildings
- Conveyancing - due to the stamp duty holiday granted by central government.

It seems people working from home want to make the most of the space they have for work/life balance.



Keeping Sandwell roads safe through winter



Sandwell Council's Highways team explains the processes involved in keeping our highways safe through winter, which are more involved than commonly thought.

We are on standby for action at any time of day or night. Around the clock from November to April, a team of engineers monitors specialised weather forecasts. These forecasts give details on air temperature, dew point and road surface temperatures. During winter, road surface temperatures can often be several degrees lower than air temperature. During the summer months, the reverse is true.

The forecasts inform our actions in keeping roads safe – including spread rates and frequency of gritting in the winter. Spread rates can be lower during marginal spells and higher during cold and wet or snowy spells. In icy conditions we may need one evening run or – during particularly bad spells of weather (such as in 2018 when Storm Emma combined with the Beast from the East) – we will make continuous runs. From the start of winter, we maintain a stockpile of around 6000 tonnes of grit.

As is the case for most council services, this winter has brought the extra challenge of coronavirus to our Highways team. We have amended our working practices to enable social distancing. We have set up

'revisit routes' to ensure Covid-19 test site entrances are clear. We have also assisted with snow clearance at vaccination centres, playing our part in ensuring an effective vaccine rollout throughout the borough.

Sandwell gritter names

A public competition was held last winter to name Sandwell's fleet of gritting vehicles. They are:

Ice One, Cyrille (*named in honour of Cyrille Regis*)

Dame Julie Salters (*named after Dame Julie Walters*)

The Greatest Snow Van

Spread Zeppelin

Frozie Lawrence (*named after Josie Lawrence*)

Frosty the Snow Van

Melt-on John

Rule Britannia

Ctrl+Salt+Delete.



Inspiring road safety with a character competition



Road safety competition winners!



During the first national lockdown, the Highways team ran a competition for children to create characters to represent road safety themes and messages delivered in its educational programme across Sandwell.

Children of all ages rose to the challenge and sent us their unique and innovative characters. We were delighted with the enthusiasm of the children and the quality of their entries. Most were home learning at the time – and we were glad they engaged with our safety messages.

The winning pupils received a £20 gift voucher for The Works, as well as an extra gift donated by The Works' store in West Bromwich.

The characters will be used in presentations, posters, road safety goodies and social media. Promoting excellent road safety habits is vital to reducing the number of children and young people killed or seriously injured on our roads in Sandwell.

Five fantastic characters were chosen as winners:

- **Road Toad** reminds us to always look both ways
- **Safety Hand** says remember to stop, look, listen and think
- **Mr Roady** says always use the pedestrian crossings
- **Chatty Mobile** instructs us to switch off when crossing roads
- **Bertie the Belt Boy** says fasten your seat belts.

Assessing Sandwell roads and planning their maintenance

The Highways team explains its new processes for assessing the condition of our roads, and how the resulting data is helping to determine maintenance programmes.

Sandwell has 874km of local road networks. Maintaining them might not sound like the most exciting of endeavours, but it is an extremely important activity. Our local highways are the arteries of our communities. They connect our residents to employment, education, local services and the wider world. They enable economic growth, social mobility and are vital in ensuring good health outcomes.

Sandwell Highways aims to be recognised as a leading Highway Authority, one that provides a well-managed highway network. Understanding the condition of our highway network is vital if we are to continue targeting road funding in the best way possible.

How do we measure road condition?

Historically, we have used automated surveys using SCANNER (Surface Condition Assessment for the National Network of Roads) to assess the surface condition of our 'A', 'B' and 'C' road networks. We have used data from Course Visual Inspection surveys for our unclassified road network. These have provided useful but limited data on the condition of our road network.

New survey techniques

The development of new survey techniques has made capturing highway condition data much faster and more powerful than traditional methods. We have been working with a company called Gaist in using high-resolution camera imagery to collect and analyse more data on the condition, defects and deterioration rates of our road network. This gives us better insight into our road infrastructure.



What has this shown us?

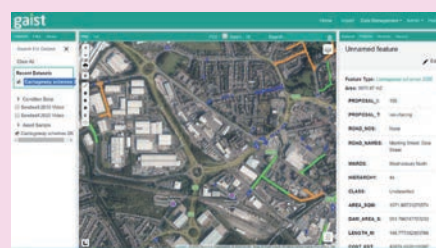
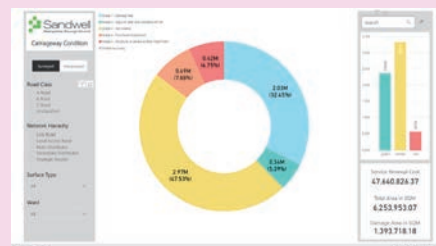
We have been able to undertake a full carriageway condition mapping exercise to visualise and colour-code our carriageway network from blue (meaning damage free) to red (indicating structural or severe surface impairment).

The survey also provides high-resolution images of our entire carriageway network.

This is starting to yield useful information:

- 32 per cent of our network is completely damage free
- 14.6 per cent has some sort of impairment
- The rest has signs of wear and tear and remains serviceable
- The estimated cost of making our network damage free is £47m

We are starting to use this information to help prioritise planned carriageway maintenance schemes.





Useful contacts:

Regeneration and Growth - think_sandwell@sandwell.gov.uk

Strategic Assets and Land - chris_hinton@sandwell.gov.uk

Spatial Planning - jenna_langford@sandwell.gov.uk

Development Management - john_baker@sandwell.gov.uk

Highways - robin_weare@sandwell.gov.uk