

Welcome to your summer 2021 edition of *Insite*, Sandwell Council's regeneration and growth magazine.

*Insite* is here for two main reasons:

- To update you on projects across Sandwell, celebrating successes and progress
- To strengthen links between Sandwell Council and our residents and businesses by telling you about what we do here, and sharing opportunities for you to work with us.

In this edition you'll find an update on the Sandwell Aquatics Centre, reasons to celebrate for the Urban Design Building Services and Local Land Charges teams, and details of useful new resources from Think Sandwell and the Sandwell Business Ambassadors.

Also, get updates on the Towns Fund projects in Sandwell and have your say on whether the whole of the borough should become a Smoke Control Area.

If you would like to respond to anything included in this *Insite*, or share news for future editions, please contact my team via [think\\_sandwell@sandwell.gov.uk](mailto:think_sandwell@sandwell.gov.uk)

In the meantime, do sign up for Think Sandwell's newsletter via [www.thinksandwell.com/newsletter](http://www.thinksandwell.com/newsletter).

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



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# Appointing Bond Wolfe Auctions as our land and property auctioneer



**Bond Wolfe Auctions has been appointed as Sandwell Council's land and property auctioneer until 31 March 2024.**

When land or property in Sandwell is declared surplus to council requirements, our Property Services team is responsible for the 'disposal' process – selling it off. Such assets could be vacant residential properties, old office blocks, schools, commercial properties, development sites (with or without planning permission), or even unusual assets such as grass verges.

We have recently appointed Bond Wolfe Auctions as our auctioneer for the next three years, after the West Midlands specialist won a public tender process.

Any council assets which go to auction will be advertised on Bond Wolfe's land and property web page.

Bond Wolfe Auctions will also sell properties via Sandwell Council's empty homes scheme, bringing vacant properties back into habitable use.



**Est. 1983**



# Retaining ISO 9001 Quality Management registration



**Urban Design and Building Services (UDBS) is celebrating success after retaining ISO 9001 Quality Management registration for all areas of activity.**

UDBS was recently assessed by the Centre for Assessment (CfA) accreditation body, in a recertification review held virtually over two days.

The assessor met with a range of staff to confirm full compliance with the standard. The CfA assessor concluded that UDBS continues to demonstrate a thorough and effective quality management system, with clearly defined processes.

Maintaining ISO 9001 encourages our UDBS team to regularly analyse and challenge all aspects of their service delivery. It means they can

utilise customer feedback and engage employees at every level. All of this results in improvements year after year and reflects their commitment to delivering high quality projects and outstanding customer satisfaction.





# Securing a legacy with Sandwell Aquatics Centre



**Sandwell Aquatics Centre is on schedule and on budget – and looks certain to create a legacy for our borough.**

A significant milestone was reached at the Sandwell Aquatics Centre in June, when the tiling of the main competition pool began.

Nigel Huddleston MP, Minister for Sport and Tourism, and Ian Reid, Chief Executive of Birmingham 2022, came to inspect the site.

## **‘Fantastic progress’**

Nigel Huddleston said: “Fantastic progress has been made on the Sandwell Aquatics Centre since I was last here in February 2020. Not only will this amazing facility help put Sandwell on the map during Birmingham 2022, it will also become an outstanding new leisure centre for the community.

It is a great example of how we are levelling up across the country, by investing money in new world-class facilities that leave a lasting legacy for local people.”

Sandwell Aquatics Centre will host the swimming and para swimming competition at the Commonwealth Games from 29 July to 3 August 2022 and the diving competition from 4 August to 8 August. This means the centre will be in use for all eleven days of competition.

Ian Reid said: “It has been great to get back on site and the Sandwell Aquatics Centre is looking incredible. There has been so much progress in the last twelve months and the credit for that must go to Sandwell Council and its construction partner.

“You can now really get a sense of how the only new build venue for our event, the Sandwell Aquatics Centre, will look during the Games. This a key competition site for Birmingham 2022, as more medals will be decided here than at any other Games venue.”

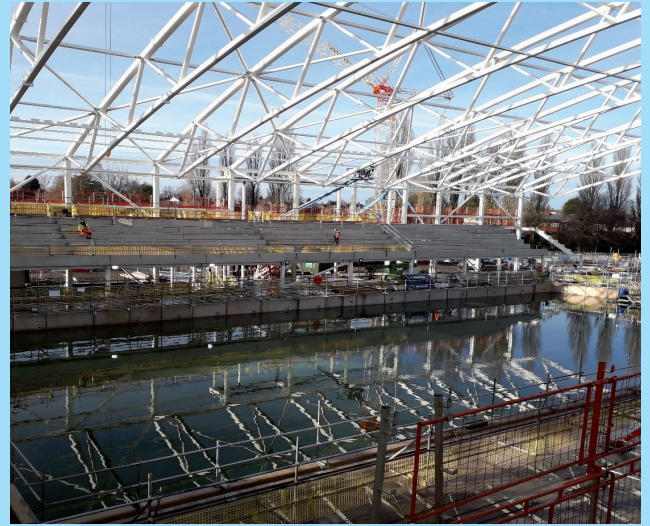


## Work experience

Students from Sandwell College are gaining work experience on the Sandwell Aquatics Centre project.

Nineteen-year-old Kye Roseblade lives just a few miles away and is studying for his Level 2 Wall and Floor Tile Diploma.

Kye said: “It’s really exciting to work on the Aquatics Centre for the Commonwealth Games. We’ve got four weeks’ work experience laying tiles in the centre and I’m really enjoying working on such a big project.”



The 10m dive tower at the centre was completed earlier in the year and recent work has included the completion of the building facades. The roof is nearing completion and curtain walling and glazing is well advanced. Internally, high-level works within the pool hall have been ongoing, including pool hall lighting, fire alarm cabling and ventilation and heating duct work.



## One of the greatest legacies

As well as being a key facility for the Commonwealth Games, the Sandwell Aquatics Centre will be one of the greatest legacies of Birmingham 2022, with the local community benefiting from having a brand-new, world-class facility on their doorstep.

The project is being overseen by Sandwell Council. Councillor Rajbir Singh, Leader of the council, said: “It was amazing seeing the new Sandwell Aquatics Centre and looking at the scale of the work being undertaken. The venue, which is located in Smethwick, is impressive and will not only serve as a host venue for the Games but will leave a lasting legacy for local residents and the wider region for generations to come.

“I am looking forward to seeing the venue completed and hosting the swimming and diving events for the Games in Smethwick.”

## Funding

The total cost of the centre, which is on schedule and on budget, is £73m. Sandwell Council is contributing £27m, with £38.5m coming from the Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games budget. A further £7.6m is funded by external partners Sport England, Black Country LEP, Sandwell Leisure Trust and the University of Wolverhampton.

# Bringing forward four major regeneration projects

**The Planning Regeneration Team – alongside other departments and consultancies – is bringing forward four major regeneration projects in Sandwell.**

Once they are delivered, we expect these projects to bring significant growth in housing provision, new employment opportunities, enhanced education and healthcare, and improved environmental quality for the borough.

## **Friar Park**

Sandwell Council is working in collaboration with the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) to bring forward this former brownfield site for housing.

Having been left vacant for several years, the former sewage works is now within the ownership of WMCA, which plans to drive forward a new community-based development. When complete, Friar Park will provide a mix of high-quality homes, open space and cycling and walking routes.

A six-week public consultation to gain the public's views on ideas for the site ended on Sunday 20 June. The consultants commissioned for this project, Tibbalds CampbellReith, will carry out a further phase of consultation later in the year to present a preferred masterplan.

## **West Bromwich masterplan**

Sandwell Council has commissioned Savills consultancy to undertake masterplanning for West Bromwich town centre.

The masterplan will help drive forward future regeneration activity in the town and create a vision for future investment opportunities. It is already taking shape, capturing the views of selective stakeholders to develop a realistic yet ambitious strategy.

The next phase is four weeks of public consultation, to gather public and other stakeholder views. Current public consultation is open until Friday 20 August at <https://www.sandwell.gov.uk/wbmasterplan>.

## **Brandhall**

Masterplanning is also underway for the former Brandhall Golf Club site in Oldbury.

AECOM has been appointed to undertake this work in conjunction with Sandwell Council, to develop an urban village based primarily upon a new, replacement school for Causeway Green Primary, good quality and affordable new housing, and a large park.

Various options have been developed so far, based on initial consultation undertaken in 2019. Views on these options were gathered in stakeholder workshops, and these will feed into a more refined, preferred option.

Later in the summer, extensive public consultation on the masterplan will be undertaken.

## **Smethwick to Birmingham corridor**

Working closely with Birmingham City Council and WMCA, Sandwell Council has helped to prepare an area framework for the regeneration corridor between Smethwick Galton Bridge Station and City Hospital in Birmingham. The commissioned consultants assisting in this work, identifying development opportunities within the area, are from Tibbalds CampbellReith.

A more detailed masterplan for the area around the new Midland Metropolitan University Hospital has also been prepared. This will help in bringing forward new housing, improved environments, a new school and better connections to existing communities.

Consultation on the area framework and masterplan will be undertaken this summer.



# Promoting positive mental health practices



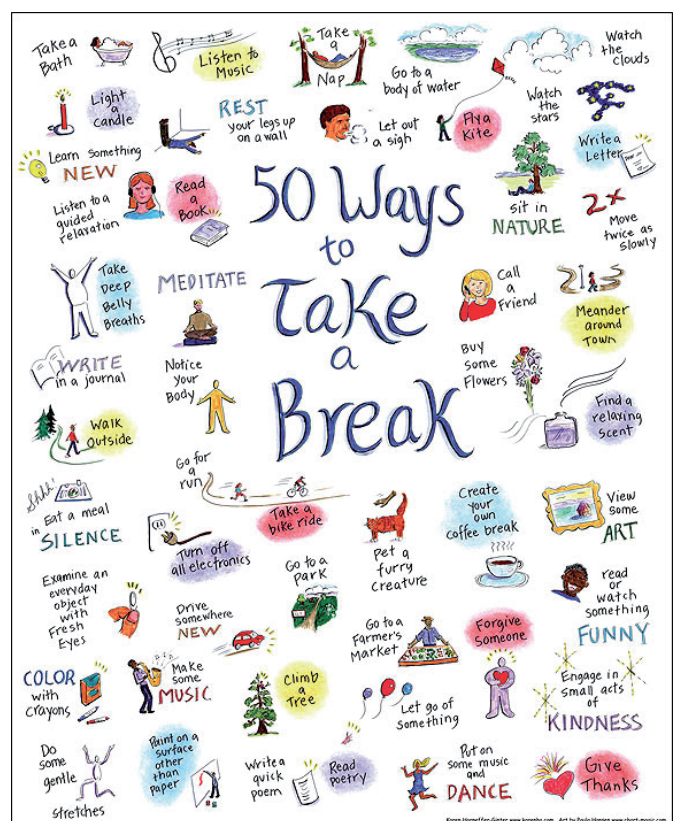
**Sandwell Business Ambassadors want to make it normal in every Sandwell workplace for people to feel comfortable talking about their anxiety, stress or depression.**

The business leaders, who liaise with Sandwell Council on issues that matter to our business community, are keen to encourage everyone to share experiences and strategies for boosting personal and collective wellbeing.

You will find a new page of resources on their website that employers and employees alike can use to find:

- Urgent support – at a time of crisis
- Workplace support – to foster a culture of wellbeing
- Personal support – to help people make positive changes to their health and lifestyle
- Quick mood boosters – that people can do even while at their desk.

You can see the resources at [www.sandwellbusinessambassadors.co.uk/our\\_work/mental-health/](http://www.sandwellbusinessambassadors.co.uk/our_work/mental-health/) - and do feel free to suggest more!



# Consulting on whether Sandwell should be a Smoke Control Area



**Sandwell Council is deciding whether the whole of the borough should become a designated Smoke Control Area (SCA), to help in the battle against poor air quality. A public survey will be open until the end of August 2021.**

In a Smoke Control Area, residents and businesses cannot emit smoke from a chimney unless burning authorised fuels, using Defra-exempt appliances or with permission under environmental Permitting Legislation. Fines can be issued to those who break the rules.

Harmful air pollutants, including fine particulate matter (PM2.5), are emitted from burning unauthorised fuels in fireplaces or in appliances that do not have a Defra exemption or an Environmental Permit.

Air pollution particularly affects the most vulnerable in society – children and older people, and those with heart and lung conditions. It is associated with many adverse health impacts.

It was expected that by the 2020s SCAs would be of little relevance as most homes and businesses would have moved away from solid fuel burning, with conversion to gas or electricity. However, the rise in popularity of woodburning stoves and biomass boilers now poses an increasing threat to air quality and the health of those living and working in the borough.

The council believes that proactive measures now to improve air quality will have long-term

positive impact by reducing the burden on the NHS, reducing health inequalities, and enabling people to live longer and healthier lives.

Declaring the whole of Sandwell as an SCA would help to reduce ambient air pollution levels and lower the health risks from domestic and commercial burning. By creating a borough-wide SCA, all neighbourhoods in Sandwell would be afforded the same level of protection from potentially harmful emissions that are created by the burning of solid fuels in domestic properties and businesses.

However, the council is conducting a survey to better understand the implications for local businesses, as well as discovering individual views on the proposal.

The survey only takes a couple of minutes to complete and closes on Monday 30 August 2021. You can complete the survey at <https://tinyurl.com/2xe6mjeb>

More information can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/smoke-control-area-rules>. If you have specific concerns or queries with regards to the SCA proposal please email [pollution\\_control@sandwell.gov.uk](mailto:pollution_control@sandwell.gov.uk).



# Updating you on the Towns Fund projects in Sandwell



## **Sandwell's successful submissions to the government's Towns Fund programme means plans for regeneration projects are progressing in Rowley Regis, Smethwick and West Bromwich.**

Collectively, these three Sandwell towns could be delivering up to £67m of regeneration via seventeen individual projects.

As part of the original submission, our three Local Boards had to make outline business cases to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG). The three areas – Rowley Regis (including parts of Oldbury), Smethwick and West Bromwich – were specifically selected by the government to bid for funding in the first place.

The next stage is to make full business cases for each of the seventeen projects over the next twelve months.

The projects need to be agreed by each of Sandwell's three Local Boards and signed off by the Super Board, before being presented to Sandwell Council's cabinet for approval to submit to MHCLG.

There are three tranches of submissions to MHCLG (in July 2021, October 2021 and February 2022), so our timing of submissions will depend on the size and complexity of each project.

The first three projects being considered are an expansion to the Ron Davis Centre on Ballot Street in Smethwick, a Mechanical Engineering Hub in West Bromwich and Digital Den in Greet's Green.

# Supporting our borough's businesses with coronavirus grants



## Grants and finance



**Since the early days of the pandemic in 2020, the Business Growth Team has been working hard to award grants to Sandwell businesses, helping to support them through restrictions and uncertainty.**

In 2020 the Business Growth Team awarded £3m-worth of discretionary grants to Sandwell businesses, supporting them during and following the first national Covid-19 lockdown period.

During the second and third lockdowns (between November 2020 and July 2021), we made a varied source of financial support available to a range of organisations and people funded by the government's Additional Restrictions Grants.

Beneficiaries have included SMEs across a wide range of sectors, plus social enterprises, sole traders, market traders and taxi drivers.

In total, through Additional Restrictions Grants, we issued 5,035 grants worth £9,486,638.

Support included monthly lockdown payments, top-up grant payments during lockdown, and grant schemes to support taxi drivers and market traders who were adversely affected by restrictions (or, in a number of cases, forced to close).

Sandwell Council set up a grant portal which allowed people to access support money online by submitting an application.

Administering large-scale funding support is a hugely complex task and we worked across many Sandwell Council services – supported on multiple occasions by colleagues working in finance and procurement, compliance and business rates. We are grateful for their help and proud of the way all these public sector professionals rallied around for our businesses and communities. A true example of excellent cross-council service delivery.

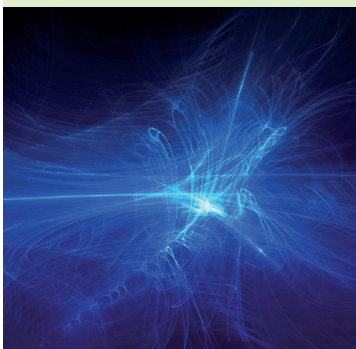


# Sharing resources on digital support and ‘going greener’

Keen to support our borough’s businesses to emerge feeling stronger and more confident from the pandemic, the Business Growth Team has added further resources to the Think Sandwell website – as well as giving the site a fresh new look.

During the height of the Covid-19 pandemic, we published and continually updated a suite of coronavirus resource pages for Sandwell businesses – sharing everything from financial support to tips on homeworking and mental health.

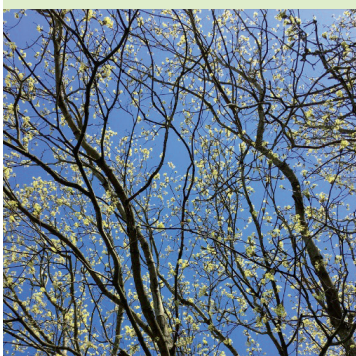
Now the region is looking ahead to post-Covid recovery, we will continue sharing up-to-date information that can help our borough’s businesses thrive. As well as engaging our web designer to make Think Sandwell look sleeker and feel easier to use, we’ve recently added two pages to our business services menu:



Digital  
Sandwell



**Digital Sandwell:** resources, training programmes, events and funding for Sandwell businesses to keep their skills fresh and maximise the benefits of the digital revolution. Plus ways for digital-savvy businesses to help ensure others in our communities are not left behind.



Going  
greener



**Going greener:** regional and national programmes to help businesses lower their carbon output and become more sustainable, training, and even small ideas that can help us all lessen our impact on the environment.

Learn more at  
[www.thinksandwell.com](https://www.thinksandwell.com).

Sign up to the Think Sandwell newsletter  
<https://www.thinksandwell.com/newsletter/>

# Boosting digital skills in Sandwell's private and third sectors



## Webinar series: Digital Marketing Strategy

Thursday 16th September,  
11am

→ Register today

In partnership with

Google Digital Garage



**Sandwell Council has teamed up with Google Digital Garage to hold a 'Digital Marketing Strategy' workshop in September.**

The online training session, taking place on Thursday 16 September, is aimed at local business owners and people from voluntary sector and community organisations. It will explore different digital marketing channels and the best ways to use them.

The event is also open to Sandwell residents who are thinking about starting a business, or who want to learn more about online marketing.

The session is free and will take place via YouTube at 11am on Thursday 16 September.

Topics will include:

- The role that digital marketing plays in a business
- How to find and engage with customers online
- How to build a digital marketing strategy.

Attendees won't be expected to have any prior knowledge or experience, or to do any preparation. It will run for an hour and include the opportunity to ask questions.

Sign up to attend via <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/google-digital-garage-digital-marketing-strategy-with-sandwell-council-tickets-166144327155>.





# Earning a shortlisted place in the Local Land Charges Awards 2021

**Congratulations to our Local Land Charges colleagues for being shortlisted in the Local Land Charges Awards 2021.**

Angela Price, Tina Hollingworth, Jane Callear, Clare Slee and David Wynn were shortlisted for 'Local Authority Searches Team of the Year' in the Land Data Local Land Charges Awards for Excellence 2021.



LAND DATA  
LOCAL LAND CHARGES  
AWARDS 2021

FINALIST

The team missed out to the London Borough of Havering at the virtual awards ceremony in June, but their commitment and dedication has been second to none. Together they have not only ensured that Sandwell's Local Authority Search responses are returned within the service level agreement, they have provided a service for Personal Searches companies with the help of a redeployed member of staff.

**Well done to everyone.**

Thank  
You

## A massive 'thank you'

Between April 2020 and March 2021, our Planning and Building Control Customer Services team has taken 13,942 incoming customer request calls.

A massive 'thank you' to Julie Beard, Tracey Hale, Bali Uppal and Parmjit Hothi from all the Services Managers and teams you support. It really has been a job well done.





## Useful contacts:

Regeneration and Growth - [think\\_sandwell@sandwell.gov.uk](mailto:think_sandwell@sandwell.gov.uk)

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