

Showcasing the region on the world stage



With most major sporting events, speculation about whether facilities and infrastructure will be ready on time seems virtually par for the course.

Refreshingly, that is not the case with the 2022 Commonwealth Games that the Midlands will proudly stage. The great majority of the sporting venues are already in place, and we still have nearly three years to go before we reach the starting line.

That is not to say there isn't work to be done. In fact, the Games is proving the catalyst for a host of work and improvements that will benefit our communities for years to come. Work started in May on the athletes' village in Perry Barr that will subsequently be turned into 1,400 new homes; preparatory work has begun for the construction of the Sandwell Aquatics Centre that will provide a world class community facility long into the future; construction begins next year to reopen the Camp Hill train line to passengers for the first time since the Second World War; three rapid Sprint bus routes are being created in time for 2022; while the Alexander Stadium will be redeveloped with additional seating capacity.

The first priority must be to ensure that these and other developments are successfully completed on schedule. But the fact that preparations are well-advanced means the region can also concentrate on maximising the impact of showcasing itself to the world. An influx of visitors will bring a short term revenue boost to the region. The longer term focus must be to attract more people to settle here and more businesses to invest, creating an even stronger local economy.

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GAMES ON!

The Commonwealth Games 2022 is just over the horizon. Ian Halstead looks at what happens now, what comes next, and what the Midlands business community might expect

Still three years out, but there's already a buzz as Birmingham gets ready to host one of the world's great sporting events.

The Commonwealth Games 2022 is predicted to draw a predicted TV audience of 1.5 billion and 5,000 athletes from 71 countries, with spectacular opening and closing ceremonies at the Alexander Stadium in front of crowds of 40,000.

Underpinning it will be hundreds of companies delivering the event and its long-term legacies. And Ian Reid, chief executive of Birmingham 2022, wants to ensure SMEs and social enterprises share in the bonanza.

"We've established a portal (birmingham2022.com) where companies must register to indicate their interest so they will receive tender notifications for their chosen sectors," he says. "The bulk of procurement starts in 2020, but we're keen to ensure awareness of the portal now.

"Companies can help themselves by researching, looking into what work was awarded at previous games, and what to do to give themselves the best chance. A significant element of our scoring when we award tenders will be around employment of local people and trainees."

Procurement will be run through the Official Journal of the European Union

(OJEU) process, but Reid is looking to make the path easier to navigate, particularly for SMEs and social enterprises.

"We don't want suppliers put off by complexity, so we're working with the chamber and two universities to hold free workshops, so SMEs can learn about the process and procurement documentation."

As well as the opening and closing ceremonies, there will be entertainment and culture around the 11-day games.

"If you listen to a city hard enough, it tells you what it wants to do – and what it wants to say to the world," says chief creative officer, Martin Green. "Until the end of 2019, it's all about listening, and meeting as many people as possible from the artistic and cultural communities.

"Then we'll start turning ideas into action, piecing together a really well-curated programme about the city and raising money from sponsors. By the end of 2020 we want to have commissioned most of the elements, so people have 12 to 18 months to create work. We'll also be reaching out to key creatives on the opening and closing ceremonies, so 2021 becomes a really active production year."

Getting the transport infrastructure right will be a mammoth task, not simply to ensure athletes, media and spectators can



be efficiently whisked to and from different stadia, but for those who live and work in and around Birmingham.

"We're at the very early stages, so we've described some of the challenges and some of the solutions we think we'd like to put in place," says Laura Shoaf, managing director of Transport for West Midlands (TfWM). "Our current proposals would represent investment of £400m.

"What we don't yet know is the detail of operational planning. This is our initial draft plan, but certainly won't be the last. We'll assess feedback and look again at what we're proposing."

The current consultation lasts until 6 December at a series of public events, and via the website tfwm.org.uk/the-draft-games-strategic-transport-plan. Core elements include major upgrades for two stations at the heart of the games, University and Perry Barr. TfWM is also exploring high speed bus routes along the A34 and A45 to the NEC, airport and Solihull.

"With regards to Metro, we're on time and to budget to deliver the extension to Centenary Square by the end of 2019, and the aim is then to get out to Edgbaston by 2021," says Shoaf. "We're looking to enhance Metro services to serve some of the non-sporting events, and investigating the use of cycling lanes, to see if we could have segregated cycling lanes and bike-sharing along the A34 and the A38."

One immediate Midlands beneficiary has been law firm Gowling WLG, appointed official legal adviser on issues from brand protection and disputes, to corporate governance and procurement.

Partner Michael Luckman says: "We're putting in place a shared project

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management platform, which will help coordinate our operations strongly and efficiently.

"Major projects are always a catalyst for innovation so this is also an opportunity for us to drive new skills and internal processes.

"The feedback we received indicated our people showed passion and engagement, which really resonated, and that they were very impressed by the innovative technology we will use to run this project."

Birmingham's renaissance in recent years has reached ever-wider audiences at home and abroad, but David Tonks, the head of Cushman & Wakefield's city office, says the 2022 games have added further lustre and depth to its appeal.

He thinks the city will benefit from its existing centres of sporting excellence, its youthful and diverse demographic profile,

and the strength of its hospitality and leisure sectors.

"It's been intriguing," he says. "When we've been in London and overseas, meeting potential investors, developers and major organisations, they're now more willing to hear the Birmingham story.

"Grand Central, Deutsche Bank and HS2 all made a tangible impact upon perceptions, but this is something different.

"Our colleagues in Manchester experienced a similar shift in mindset before the 2002 games. The legacy benefits were still being felt five and ten years later, and we'll see that in Birmingham.

"The ripple effect will reach Solihull and Coventry. It's not just enhancements in the built fabric. There will be less visible effects, more at the subconscious level."

Dene Jones, Lloyds Bank regional director, believes that the timing of the games couldn't be better. He says: "The London Olympics, and the Commonwealth Games in Glasgow and Manchester, created a feel-good factor, significant commercial opportunities for local and regional businesses, and enormous employment benefits, and this will happen here. We will see local communities coming together around a common purpose." ■