



**NOTES**  
**OF THE MEETING OF THE**  
**COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT GROUP**  
**TUESDAY 9 APRIL 2013**

Held at 7.00 pm in the Council Chamber, Civic Centre, Pavilion Road, West Bridgford

**PRESENT:**

Councillors N C Lawrence (Chairman), S J Boote, N K Boughton-Smith, T Combellack, L B Cooper, J E Greenwood, M G Hemsley, G R Mallender, J A Stockwood (substitute for Councillor Mrs M M Males)

**OFFICERS PRESENT:**

D Banks	Executive Manager - Neighbourhoods
A Graham	Chief Executive
K Marriott	Executive Manager - Transformation
D Mitchell	Executive Manager - Communities
V Nightingale	Senior Member Support Officer

**APOLOGY FOR ABSENCE:**

Councillor Mrs M M Males

**19. Declarations of Interest**

There were none declared.

**20. Notes of the Previous Meeting**

The notes of the meeting held on Tuesday 5 February 2013 were accepted as a true record.

The Chairman stated that it would be necessary to add a review of Assets of Community Value and the Community Right to Challenge into the Group's work programme.

With regard to the action sheet Members noted the responses. Following a question regarding the provision of one or two bedroomed properties officers stated that this had been taken on board and had been addressed at the recent Members' briefing session about strategic housing. A complete list of topics considered by the Group had been included and this would be considered as part of the Group's discussion about its work programme. Members also noted that there were vacant positions for parish councillors, which indicated there were difficulties in recruiting people.

**21. Economic Assessment**

Following a request at the last meeting the Executive Manager - Transformation gave a presentation on the current situation in respect of the Council supporting economic growth. She informed the Group that one of the three corporate priorities within the Corporate Strategy was to support economic growth by ensuring there was a sustainable, prosperous and thriving

local economy. She stated that Rushcliffe benefitted from a buoyant economy, whereas other boroughs had particular issues regarding worklessness, and therefore the market had been left to regulate itself with no adverse effects. Although it was noted that this could be affected by the recent economic downturn and the introduction of new collection charging for business rates. Another issue for Rushcliffe was its lack of brownfield sites for development. She informed Members that there were a variety of agencies who provided help to businesses and it was important that the Council did not duplicate this.

For the Group's information the Executive Manager - Transformation explained Central Government's four key aims to help the economy grow. She also explained the changes the Government had made in achieving these, including the replacement of the regional development agencies with local enterprise partnerships. These partnerships were business led not public led. In this area it was called D2N2 however the leaders of Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire County Councils, and Nottingham and Derby City Councils were members of the partnership. From the East Midlands Development Agency Rushcliffe had received funding for creating start-up units at the old colliery site at Cotgrave and also to look at working up a viable masterplan for Cotgrave Town Centre. Under the new partnerships funding would be available to improve business growth, however this was often recyclable grants for larger companies to help with expansion costs.

With regard to public sector led economic development Members were informed of the work undertaken by Nottinghamshire County Council, Nottingham City Council and Rushcliffe Borough Council to promote economic growth with partners. She stated that the County Council had led on regeneration projects across the county, secured public and private sector investment in infrastructure and worked to develop a network of business innovation centres. One project that was particularly pertinent to Rushcliffe was their work with BDUK on a tender relating to the provision of broadband, which affected many homes and businesses in the rural areas.

In respect of the City Council they had provided a comprehensive support package for activity in Nottingham, trade and inward investment agency to encourage foreign businesses to have a base in the county, help to reduce worklessness, an employer hub which allowed businesses to buy in to training and recruitment services, and Nottingham Connect which linked businesses together for support. Rushcliffe Borough Council provided support and information to interested companies regarding available employment sites in the Borough, provided a variety of commercial accommodation, and actively supported the Rushcliffe Business Partnership. Through the Partnership there had been many events held providing valuable networking opportunities and information. Annually an event is held for the larger businesses in the Borough which provides the Council with information on their issues and successes. The Executive Manager - Transformation explained that recently the Council had been disposing of the old Gresham site and following an enquiry a local company had now put in for planning permission to develop the site. She was also pleased to inform the Group that the industrial units were 97% occupied which was above market expectation. The Council did offer more flexible arrangements by offering commercial rents with flexible leaseholds, which helped start-up businesses.

Other business support was available via the Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire Chambers of Commerce, the Federation of Small Businesses, the Confederation of British Industry for the East Midlands, UK Trade and Investment, and Nottingham Business Ventures Enterprise Solutions.

With regards to the Borough the Executive Manager - Transformation explained that it was a mainly rural area that was defined within the Nottingham-Derby Green Belt. It had an excellent highways network which allowed businesses connectivity. Within the 1996 Local Plan there was 51 hectares of allocated employment land remaining, however, none of this has current planning permission for development. Within the draft Core Strategy there was a target for Greater Nottingham to provide 59,900m<sup>2</sup> of office space and 20 hectares of new industrial and warehouse land. Since 2006 there had been 46 "windfall" employment sites, consisting of farm buildings and land being diversified, with permission, or applying for permission, to be used for employment. Often this was for storage or warehousing which did not create many jobs. There had been no employment sites commenced during the last year due to issues about development costs and infrastructure links.

Members were informed that, based on the Office of National Statistics data, in 2011 there were 4,620 active businesses in the Borough, with the majority employing up to 4 people. Many companies had been in existence for over 10 years and were of a professional nature. During 2011, 470 businesses had opened, however the same number had closed, both statistics being the highest in the county. A recent search on the Estates Gazette website revealed that in the retail sector there were only 7 vacant units in Rushcliffe compared to 223 in Nottinghamshire.

With regards to residents 74% between the ages of 16-64 were in employment, with 1,323 people claiming job seekers allowance. Within Rushcliffe 39% of residents worked within the Borough. Information from local businesses indicated that West Bridgford had a valuable night time economy and that the large sporting events, ie Nottingham Forest Football Club's matches and Test matches, brought in extra revenue.

From networking events a small number of businesses had stated that the benefits of being in the Borough were that this was an affluent area with close proximity and access to other cities. The challenges were the current economic climate, high rents, finding good staff, public spending, new businesses and competition. They felt that the Council could support new and existing businesses by providing grants, more networking opportunities, local advertising for local businesses only and incubator office space. Following on from a business event the three top suggestions were a co-ordinated events calendar, a dedicated Rushcliffe Business forum and a review of parking charges, including a redemption if visitors used a local business or to coincide with events.

The Executive Manager - Transformation stated that, having consideration to what other provision there was, the main areas to focus on for the Council were to adopt and implement the Local Plan, support businesses, utilise the Council's property and estates, promote Rushcliffe and regenerate Cotgrave. Members were informed that the Executive Manager – Finance and

Commercial was currently investigating options regarding a commercial loan scheme.

Some Members were concerned that by delivering on this part of the Corporate Strategy, especially loans which would have an element of risk, other parts of the Strategy would not be delivered. The Chief Executive stated that no decision had been made regarding commercial loans. He informed the Group that other local authorities were considering this option and making large sums of money available. At present the Executive Manager – Finance and Commercial was investigating the options and any decision would follow the decision making process. The Corporate Strategy had been agreed and the funds would need to be balanced to achieve it. The Executive Manager - Transformation stated that the Council had not received a lot of requests but would like to be able to assist business that were already in or would like to relocate to the Borough. Members agreed that the Council should promote the benefits of the Borough. Officers stated the Leader was very active in promoting the area's benefits.

Following a question regarding the regeneration of Cotgrave the Executive Manager - Transformation explained that there was outline planning permission for the former colliery site and that the developer had been appointed as the preferred partner on the Town Centre Board. She stated that it was anticipated that work would start on site in January 2014. The viability of the Town Centre project was dependent on market conditions but it was hoped that a supermarket partner could be brought into the scheme in the near future. The Chief Executive stated that it was felt that, following the dualling of the A46, there was now an opportunity to work with Newark and Sherwood District Council to develop the A46 corridor and rejuvenate the area.

Members discussed whether rents or car parking charges had an affect on the composition of the 'high streets' in the Borough. Officers explained that there was a national issue regarding the decline of the 'high streets', however, in Rushcliffe there were very few vacant units. With regard to rents these were not set by the Borough Council. In relation to charity shops Members were informed that they received mandatory relief in respect of Business Rates. Members were informed that there was no evidence to suggest that car parking charges were affecting businesses in fact the number of people paying had increased over the last few years.

Members queried if the Council provided a list of empty properties for businesses. The Executive Manager - Transformation stated that information was provided about any of the Council's empty properties, however there were not a large number of empty units in the Borough. It was noted that businesses did not have to inform the Council of their existence and due to the number of businesses run from homes and via the internet it was agreed that a comprehensive list would not be possible to maintain. Officers had been made aware of a shortage of units for small flexible expanding businesses. Officers were investigating opportunities for the Council to assist. It was noted that it would not be commercially viable to build incubation units, however the Council could look at the Civic Centre and enter into flexible leases on accommodation. Following a discussion Members felt that this could help smaller businesses.

In respect of linking local people to local employees Members were informed of the Local Employment Partnerships. The Group felt that this would be very beneficial and should be seen as good practice and incorporated within Section 106 agreements.

Members were pleased to note that there had been 46 sites, consisting farm building and land, with permission, or applying for permission, to be used for employment. It was suggested that information could be collated to encourage more farmers to consider using their land in this way and that this could form the basis for a Rushcliffe Business Partnership meeting. Although it was recognised that this information might be available from the National Farmers' Union. It was also recognised that the lack of broadband availability in the rural areas was a barrier to some businesses. Officers explained that this was a clear priority and that they were working with BDUK to overcome this problem.

Members asked for an update regarding the Hall in West Bridgford. The Executive Manager - Transformation stated that the Council was currently going through a tender process. A recent consultation exercise had been carried out on future uses for the Hall. A briefing note would be provided within the next few weeks.

It was AGREED that Members

- a. were informed of the strategic context and current data
- b. noted the actions and priorities proposed within the table at Appendix A for the coming year.
- c. recognised the work officers were doing to progress this strategic priority within the resources available
- d. would consider this issue again after 12 months.

## **22. Feedback and Update Regarding the Borough Council's Relationship with the Parishes**

The Executive Manager - Communities made a presentation which gave an update from the discussion at the last meeting and outlined the results of the consultation with the parish councils. He stated that there were 199 parishes in the County with Newark and Sherwood having the most. There were 58 in the Borough which was the second highest number; with a maximum of 339 parish council positions. He explained that both Lincolnshire and Nottinghamshire County Councils had conducted a review of parishes over the last few years. Several recommendations had been made that could be explored whilst considering the Borough's relationship with the parishes.

Following the last meeting two specific officers had been identified at the County Council and in future they would be included in any communications with the parishes.

The consultation had been amended to include the Group's views from the last meeting and had been sent to all parish/town councils, parish meetings and

Borough Councillors. There had been 13 responses received from the parishes and 5 from Borough Councillors, which gave officers limited data to work with. The majority of parishes rated their overall satisfaction with the current relationship as good or very good; from the 2 who rated it as poor one felt that they were bombarded with communications and the other had issues with the County Highways service.

In respect of the support from Borough Councillors the parishes felt that they kept them informed and raised their concerns with the Borough, they discussed finance, legal and planning issues, showed interest in current events and used their community support fund to support community groups.

With regard to officers it was felt that they were very helpful when contacted for advice, discussed finance and legal issues, gave advice on planning, conservation and environmental issues, and were approachable regarding depot services.

In response to the question about the top issues why the parishes contacted the Borough it was stated that it was regarding environmental, financial and planning issues. It had been agreed that planning would be discussed at the next parish forum on 24 April 2013 and that the Core Strategy would be considered at the next parish conference.

The majority of the parishes had acknowledged that they struggle to just do their own work and did not have any ideas of any ways they could help the Borough apart from disseminating information.

The Executive Manager - Communities gave two key areas for improvement in the future. These were communications and planning. With regard to planning it was felt that the next parish forum would provide a good opportunity for improved understanding on planning matters. In respect of communication there should be improved contact details, clear concise communications written in plain English with no jargon and improved contact by electronic means.

Other comments that had been received were that the smaller parishes would like to have a link officer, that the same information should not be sent by email and paper copy, the Borough Council could act as a conduit between the parishes and the County Council and that the involvement of parishes should be tailored to the parishes needs.

Following consideration officers were recommending that:

- a one page summary of the 'Partnership with the Parishes' document be produced for town and parish councils for quick reference
- re-emphasise that Member Services would act as a filter for contact by parishes. Member Services would filter questions to respective Executive Managers and their teams
- where possible executive summaries of large Council documents in plain English be supplied to town and parish councils

- a forward plan of training for town and parish forums should be developed but with increased emphasis on the parishes leading the programme and involving other parties, ie the County Council
- key county link officers to be included in communications to town and parishes and future collaboration opportunities be explored
- the Chairman of this Group to arrange a meeting of those seven parishes that had expressed an interest to review the outputs and outcomes of the recommendations

The Group agreed that an executive summary in plain English of Council documents was an excellent idea. They also agreed that there was a need to reduce the amount of paper that was sent to the parishes. The Executive Manager - Communities accepted that it would be a challenge to tailor the requirements of each parish. Members discussed the pros and cons of sending everything by email, in particular when it was a large document and taking into consideration the issues rural areas had with broadband. One of the concerns was planning applications especially drawings viewed via Blueprint.

With regard to planning Members agreed that this was an area of concern in the parishes. One useful document that had been recently produced for councillors was a table of material and non-material considerations. The Group felt that this could be useful for the parishes as it focussed people's views. Members believed that it would be beneficial if information could be provided on cards for new parish councillors as there was not always a parish office in every area.

Members suggested that documents could be colour coded depending on the subject.

With regard to link officers the Executive Manager - Communities stated that each of the large six parishes had an Executive Manager contact. The Executive Manager – Neighbourhoods and Executive Manager - Communities stated that they had already opened up a dialogue with three of the parishes.

The Group AGREED the recommendations made and felt that a review should be undertaken in twelve months.

## 23. **Work Programme**

The Group discussed its work programme. It was noted that tonight's discussion on Economic Development had been brought forward from the meeting on 29 October, a review would be programmed in for 18 March 2014. It was anticipated that the review of Assets of Community Value and the Community Right to Challenge could be programmed into the Group's meeting on 29 October 2013, with a review of the relationship with the parishes on 6 May 2014.

The Chairman asked Members to consider the list of topics provided and email him with any suggestions of topics for future meetings.

The meeting closed at 9.20 pm.

**Action Sheet****COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT GROUP - TUESDAY 9 APRIL 2013**

<b>Minute Number</b>	<b>Actions</b>	<b>Officer Responsible</b>
21. Economic Assessment	a) Officers to collate information regarding changing farm buildings and land to employment use, and encourage the Rushcliffe Business Partnership to hold a meeting on this topic.  b) Officers to provide a briefing note on the consultation exercise on Bridgford Hall	The Executive Manager - Transformation  The Executive Manager - Transformation
23. Work Programme	Members to consider the list of topics provided and email the Chairman with suggestions of topics for future meetings.	All Members