

MINUTES
OF THE MEETING OF THE
GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT SCRUTINY GROUP
WEDNESDAY, 19 JULY 2023

Held at 7.00 pm in the Council Chamber, Rushcliffe Arena, Rugby Road, West
Bridgford

PRESENT:

Councillors R Walker (Chair), L Way (Vice-Chair), R Butler, K Chewings,
J Cottee, S Dellar, C Grocock, P Matthews and D Soloman

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

None

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

C Evans

Service Manager - Economic Growth
and Property

R Churchill

Rushcliffe Oaks Manager

P Phillips

Senior Ecology and Sustainability
Officer

T Coop

Democratic Services Officer

APOLOGIES:

None

1 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest reported.

2 Minutes of the Meeting held on 08 March 2023

The minutes of the meeting held on 8 March 2023 were approved as a true record and were signed by the Chair.

The Chair proposed a change in the order of which the items on the agenda would be discussed, switching item 6, Review of Rushcliffe Oaks Crematorium with item 5, Biodiversity Net Gain. This was agreed by the Group.

3 Role and Remit of Growth and Development Scrutiny Group

The Service Manager – Economic Growth and Property informed the Group of it's Terms of Reference, and the purpose of the Group to positively and proactively contribute to the ongoing success and management of the Council.

It was noted that the Group will achieve this by:

- Overseeing significant projects in the Borough to ensure deliverables are met and growth-related outcomes achieved
- Scrutinise infrastructure development to ensure development is progressed in a timely manner and any obstructive barriers are removed or negotiated

- Review the growth in demand for Council services, ensuring all residents can access the services they need
- Consider projects and initiatives to promote economic vibrancy, local democracy and community leadership with local towns and villages
- Review the Council's policies and strategies as appropriate prior to adoption

The Group were advised that the Service Manager – Economic Growth and Property would support and attend the Group meetings.

4 **Review of Rushcliffe Oaks Crematorium**

The Rushcliffe Oaks Manager delivered a presentation that provided the Group with a brief background of the Rushcliffe Oaks Crematorium project and information on its current position, future plans and areas for development.

The Group were advised the crematorium opened for business on 3 April 2023, which was later than had been expected due to delays around Covid and supply chain issues.

The Rushcliffe Oaks Manager advised the Group that there are 4 members of staff, Manager, Senior Attendant and two Attendants who were recruited into post over the past two years, allowing time for training and setting up all required processes, procedures and risk assessments. It was also noted that a member of the Streetwise Team is based at the crematorium full time to take care of the ground's maintenance.

Since opening the doors of the Crematorium it was reported that there has been a steady rise in take up of cremation services and as with any new facility, the first few months have focused on building an excellent reputation and good relationships with partners. Feedback from funeral directors has been positive, with some travelling some distance and returning to use Rushcliffe Oaks over crematoriums nearer to them. The Rushcliffe Oaks Manager expressed that by far the most rewarding feedback has come from families who have got in touch to say thank you. The Rushcliffe Oaks Manager explained that it is difficult to quantify customer feedback due to the sensitive nature of the business.

The Rushcliffe Oaks Manager provided information in respect of communication and engagement with site visits for industry colleagues, local businesses, Councillors and officers prior to opening and an open day scheduled for all on Saturday 22 July 2023. Adverts had been placed in local brochures and where appropriate the team will look to get involved in local events and have aspirations to set up a 'Friends of Group'. Social Media pages were set up to give updates during the build phase and since opening regular posts are created to give out relevant information.

The Rushcliffe Oaks Manager advised the Group of some of the memorialisation options that the Crematorium currently offer including a memorial tree sculpture, engraved slats on a curved bench and curb stones to name a few, all sourced locally using local materials. The Group were asked to consider other ideas to offer in the future.

Members asked specific questions relating to the memorialisation and how quickly are the items on offer likely to fill up and what were the plans to future proof these facilities. The Rushcliffe Oaks Manager explained that statistics for take up of memorialisation's is around 4% and Most are offered as a lease whereby it can be renewed or collected by the family. In addition, the team were looking at other options for example turning ashes to glass in the way of a keepsake.

Members commented on waiting times for funeral services and how distressing this can be for families and where current users were coming from, suggesting the facility is advertised more widely across the borough and beyond to help increase its usage. It was noted that there are no crematoria facilities at Grantham, Newark or Melton Mowbray who's local Authorities boarder the Borough. The Rushcliffe Oaks Manager explained that it is the funeral directors who have direct contact with the crematorium services on offer and that it is them who liaise with family members to arrange a funeral service and therefore obtaining addresses for data capturing has proved difficult, in the instances where family have been prepared to travel the distance to use Rushcliffe Oaks, the deceased has had some connection with the area. It was noted that there are also many independent funeral directors who are not as easy to locate as the larger national ones and Members felt more could be done to locate and approach these smaller funeral businesses to make them aware of the unique services Rushcliffe Oaks can provide.

One Member of the Group commented on the number of services currently being conducted against the target highlighted in the report and questioned what was in place to increase business with the aim of fulfilling the target aspirations and provide value for money. The Service Manager – Economic Growth and Property explained that 3 services per day had always been the initial starting point for the new business, with the intention of increasing numbers with time. The Rushcliffe Oaks Manager added that the facility is limited to a maximum of 6 services per day when fully operational.

Members expressed that reputation and care are good business foundations and were appreciative of officers for their considerations and design in developing a sensitive and quality facility with families at the forefront, providing choices in how they would like services to be conducted and the provision for memorialisation options.

Members asked specific questions in relation to other crematorium facilities nearby and in particular the viability of services at Wilford Hill, and whether Rushcliffe Oaks costs for services were competitive with other crematoriums in the area. The Rushcliffe Oaks Manager advised that Wilford Hill were looking to expand its facility with the provision of an electric cremator. Wilford Hill services were more traditional and are currently cheaper than those offered at Rushcliffe Oaks and Gedling. The Group were also advised that Rushcliffe Oaks had already established good relationships with other crematorium staff in the area, including a networking group where experiences and support is shared.

The Chair praised the work of officers and the Rushcliffe Oaks Team for their

enthusiasm and commitment in establishing the new crematorium facility, adding the importance of the value of time given to families to ensure Rushcliffe Oaks continues to meet its user's expectations.

The Rushcliffe Oaks Manager informed the Group that the work undertaken so far has been very rewarding which is reflected by the Team and relationships with other service providers. The Group were invited to visit the facility so they can see first hand what an excellent provision and business opportunity this is for the Council.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Growth and Development Scrutiny Group:

- a) Provided comment on the operation of the crematorium to date and proposed that Rushcliffe Oaks is brought back to Growth and Development Scrutiny Group at a later date for further comment and feedback
- b) Shared their aspirations for the future development and Growth of the crematorium

5 **Biodiversity Net Gain - New Legislation**

The Senior Ecology and Sustainability Officer delivered a presentation to the Group which provided information on the Environment Act 2021 and the new Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) requirements for planning under the Act and what this will mean for the Council.

The Group were given a brief explanation of what Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) is as follows:

'BNG is an approach to development, and/or land management, that aims to leave the natural environment in a measurably better state than it was beforehand'

The Senior Ecology and Sustainability Officer advised the Group that the BNG aspects of the Environment Act 2021 does not come into force until the Secretary of State authorises it, this is expected to be from November 2023 and would mandate Biodiversity Net Gain into the planning process. The Group were advised that the Minimum mandatory gain will be set at 10%, however local authorities would be able to vary this upwards if desired. The mechanism for delivery is within on-site or off-site habitat secured for at least 30 years and as a last resort there will be statutory credits where units for delivery are not available for which revenue generated would only be used at the discretion of the Secretary of State and Natural England.

The Group were asked to note the developments baseline and post intervention biodiversity unit values which are calculated using a standardised Biodiversity Metric, (an extract of the spreadsheet was provided for information), a register for off-site net gain sites will also be mandated. It was also noted that BNG does not change the existing ecological legal protections.

The Senior Ecology and Sustainability Officer outlined the Council's proposal for sites that the Council regards as strategically significant and formally

identified in local strategies, these are development sites which are within or immediately adjacent to:

- Designated Priority Sites for example, designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), a Local Nature Reserve (LNR) or a Local wildlife Site (LWS).
- Listed Green and Blue Infrastructure sites as identified in the Greater Nottingham Blue and Green Infrastructure Strategy (January 2022)
- Focal areas identified within the Rushcliffe Biodiversity Opportunity Mapping report
- Sites managed with nature conservation as a major priority as identified in the Rushcliffe Nature Conservation Strategy

The Group were asked to note that it is proposed that all Biodiversity Net Gain provided within Rushcliffe but outside areas listed above will be regarded as '*Location Ecologically desirable but not within a local strategy*'. Biodiversity Net Gain outside of Rushcliffe will be regarded as '*Area/compensation not in local strategy*'.

The Senior Ecology and Sustainability Officer explained the BNG procedure at Rushcliffe expressing the first part would be completed at the approval stage for a planning application prior to determination of the planning permission. The Ecologist Officer would check the BNG Metric and BNG initial plan, for all major developments and provide comments and recommendations to planning which would then be discharged by way of planning conditions. At post development ongoing site monitoring would continue. Smaller sites (and where there are no protected species, habitats or sites) would be assessed by planning officers. If planning conditions are not met, then planning enforcement would take enforcement action.

The Chair expressed how much detail there was in the proposals for the Group to understand and the difficulty in endorsing the proposals without seeing sight of the Governments final legislation and guidance resulting in some members of the Group feeling compelled to reject the proposals until the Government provide the statutory information. The Senior Ecologist and Sustainability Officer explained the 10% Net Gain can already be directed by the Secretary of State for the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (DEFRA) and to do nothing at this stage would leave the Council in a difficult position to meet its planning obligations once the Biodiversity Net Gain legislation is imposed on local authorities in November 2023.

Concerns were raised in respect of small sites where fewer checks that any BNG has been provided and in addition concerns were also raised in respect of the 30year management of BNG's and who would be responsible for checking when the developers pass the development over to a management company. The Group were advised that Rushcliffe is a rural Borough and there is an element of risk with the loss of some ecology; with smaller sites officers rely on google earth to form a risk-based assessment, the more sensitive or bigger the site the higher the risk and importance to put conditions in place at the planning approval stage. With regards to checking the proposal, this would require an alert register to be established, monitoring reports from the site developer/managers, will be a planning condition and legal formulas will be

used to make the proposals enforceable.

A member of the Group suggested that as the nature of the Borough is rural could Town and Parish Council's act as agents to support the Borough with the management of the 30year monitoring. The Senior Ecologist and Sustainability Officer offered to feed this back to planning officers as a solution for some of the more remote rural developments going forward.

Members asked specific questions relating to the Statutory Credits and could the Council put forward locations within the Borough that might benefit from the mechanism of credits where BNG cannot be provided on-site or off-site. The Ecology and Sustainability Officer explained that the details of the Statutory Credits are still unclear, however to date there have been three companies seeking sites within the Borough to provide off-site BNG, which would allow the Council to sign post developers.

Members expressed their concerns in respect of the lack of detail being provided by Government and the proposals being subject to change. Members asked if there were comparisons or experiences from other authorities that officers at Rushcliffe could adapt. The Ecologist and Sustainability Officer advised that he was not aware of any detailed proposals in Nottinghamshire but had taken best ideas from some of the work offered by Warwickshire and Cambridge Council's. In addition, the Group were advised that the proposals used methodology set out by others for example, sites of special scientific interest, Local Nature Reserves, Local Wildlife Sites and the Blue and Green Infrastructure Sites identified in the Greater Nottingham Strategy.

The Group agreed the policy was needed but were concerned at the limited resources available and the lack of detail about the statutory requirements in the proposals they were being asked to approve for recommendation to Cabinet. The Chair requested that consideration be given to officer resources and that this be reflected in the recommendation.

It was **RESOLVED** that Growth and Development Scrutiny Group

- a) acquaint themselves with the new Biodiversity Net Gain in Planning rules and the proposals on how this will be implemented in Rushcliffe
- b) approve the proposals for assessing strategic significance
- c) endorse the proposals on the; consideration, assessment, delivery and monitoring of BNG in Rushcliffe
- d) recommend to Cabinet that the proposals require careful consideration for officer resources before being adopted by Council.

6 **Work Programme**

The Service Manager – Economic Growth and property presented the report of the Director – Finance and Corporate Services, which detailed the proposed Growth and Development Scrutiny Group Work Programme for 2023/24.

The Group requested that a further review be provided for Rushcliffe Oaks Crematorium as it was felt that it had been too soon to comment on the performance of the facility at this early stage. It was agreed that the Growth Scrutiny Group meeting expected to be scheduled for June 2024 would be a more appropriate time for review. It was noted that this would be referred to the Corporate Overview Group for approval.

Councillor Grocock requested whether an item on Nottinghamshire’s activities in respect of people and skills and the impact these have on Rushcliffe residents could be considered for scrutiny by the Group. The Service Manager – Economic Growth and Property advised that a Scrutiny Matrix would need to be completed and approved by the Corporate Overview Group.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Work Programme detailed below be approved by the Growth and Development Scrutiny Group:

4 October 2023

- How the Borough works with partners to plan for the infrastructure required to support growth
- Review of the Growth Boards
- Work Programme

3 January 2024

- Sewerage Infrastructure and Discharge within Rushcliffe
- Management of Open Spaces
- Work Programme

6 March 2024

- Work Programme

Action Table – 19 July 2023

Min No.	Action	Officer Responsible
4	Members requested more clarity on the figures provided in respect of the number of cremations and cost of cremations before the facility is likely to provide a return in income for the Council	The Senior Manager – Rushcliffe Oaks
4	Members requested that the Growth and Development Scrutiny Group visit the facility to provide a better understanding of its operation	The Senior Manager – Rushcliffe Oaks