

the Environment Agency to establish an action plan for preventative measures in respect of new developments to assist Officers and Councillors when applying conditions to planning applications.

The meeting was attended by two representatives from the Environment Agency. However, the Group noted that Severn Trent Water had advised that they could not attend meetings at an individual district level due to the size of the area they covered.

Strategic and Development Control Planning

Mr Paul Goldsmith, Sustainable Places and Planning Specialist at the Environment Agency (EA) delivered a presentation to update the Group on the Environment Agencies response to strategic and development control planning consultations when commenting on planning applications.

These include:

- Fluvial Flood Risk (river flood risk)
- Groundwater and Contaminated Land
- Land and Water (surface water quality)
- Fisheries, Biodiversity and Geomorphology
- Regulated Industry (power stations, anaerobic digestion plants etc)

The Group were informed that the EA are asked to comment on all applications within flood zone 3.

As well as the above specialisms the EA are also asked to comment on strategic planning documents that form part of a Local Authorities local plan, for example:

- Water Cycle Strategy
- Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA)
- Surface Water Management Plans
- Strategic Infrastructure Plans
- Environmental and/or Blue and Green Infrastructure Studies
- Strategic Housing and Employment Land Availability Assessments

Mr Goldsmith highlighted the EA's support in respect of the Greater Nottingham Strategic Plan and the support and advice they have provided and continue to provide across a wide range of disciplines including the Greater Nottingham Strategic Flood Risk Assessment update, water cycle study and site allocations to name a few.

With regards to planning applications, Mr Goldsmith advised that the EA are consulted as statutory consultees where application sites are located within areas with constraints which fall within the remit of the EA. The advice provided is given as advice and it is ultimately the decision maker, Rushcliffe Borough Council as the Local Planning Authority who can choose to overrule the EA's comments.

With regards to flood risk Mr Goldsmith advised the Group that the EA works closely with other key partners at Severn Trent Water (STW) and the Lead Local Flood Authority (LLFA), with the primary remit for flood risk being fluvial

flood risk from both the River Trent and River Smite and ordinary watercourses where a site falls within flood zone 3.

The Group noted that the EA are the regulator for the sewerage sector (STW) and ensure that the required permits are applied for and adhered to.

Mr Goldsmith commented on the recent storms, 'Babet' and 'Henk' and the impact they had on local communities within the Borough. The Group noted the EA's work was currently in the recovery phase, which involves investigating the causes of flooding some communities experienced.

Mr Goldsmith informed the Group that to date the EA has undertaken the largest number of community visits and intel gathering across all its' regional divisions as part of their role and commitment to their responsibilities under section 19 of the Flood Water Management Act 2010, thus allowing for better relationships with partners by sharing information and building more flood resistant communities.

Councillor Grocock asked what defines a water course and are rivers and watercourses in the Borough regularly inspected and maintained to help eliminate the level of impact caused by flooding. Mr Goldsmith explained that a watercourse can be defined as the tributary of a main river and where water could potentially spread in the event of flooding, adding that an over spill from a tributary watercourse may have some impact on a new development. Mr Goldsmith highlighted the importance of sharing information with other partners such as the Lead Local Flood Authority (LLFA) to get a greater understanding of flood mapping to increase greater resilience for future planning.

Councillor Grocock asked whether the Council had overruled any flood risk advice the EA had provided when determining a planning application. Mr Goldsmith advised that he was not aware of any issues and complimented the Council's Planning department, expressing that officers were excellent to work with, in order to meet a solution.

Sustainable Growth

Mr Stephen Marwood from the Environment Agency delivered a presentation to inform the Group of the EA's Adaptive Investment for Growth document which had been produced alongside Nottinghamshire County Council's Inward Investment Framework. The EA document is to provide an engagement platform with District and Borough Council's on environment constraints and creating sustainable growth.

Mr Marwood explained that the EA commissioned a piece of work to develop the key concepts and provide the methodology for the agencies Adaptive Investment Prospectus which Mr Marwood had circulated to the Group for further information and reading.

The Group were advised that the methodology that was created could be utilised as a national dataset of indicators around environment inequalities and constraints, including flood risk and extreme heat which will become a more frequent issue in the future. A Countywide overview gave the EA a good

representation that could be broken down to create District and Borough scorecards looking at common shared constraints in respect of quality of life and future sustainable economic prosperity across districts.

With regards to the Adaptive Investment for Growth Prospectus, Mr Marwood asked the Group to consider climate risk and the compounding threats from:

- Heatwaves – the increase in frequency, drought and wildfires
- Increased Health Vulnerabilities and exposure to poor air quality
- Increase in summer flash and winter rainfall events
- Water scarcity and threats to intensive agriculture and competitiveness

Lastly, Mr Marwood explained that if adaptive opportunities could be realised sooner and preventative interventions were put in place early enough this could outweigh any future costs.

The Group commented on the Rushcliffe Borough Scorecard and were surprised at the poor score given to the environmental inequality relating to plants and wildlife and asked why this was the case given that Rushcliffe is predominantly rural. Mr Marwood explained this is due to the Borough having a lower number of areas of plant and wildlife significance or protection. The Chairman suggested that biodiversity net gain could be addressed during future planning processes and possible interventions at Rushcliffe Country Park.

Cllr Butler asked a specific question in relation to the recent storms where some residents have been affected by flooding on one or more occasions and can the Council be confident that information is being fed back to residents. Mr Marwood advised that the EA is doing all it can to alleviate immediate flood risk when events happen, adding that residents need to make immediate contact with the agency as the flood is happening so agency officers can map and gather as much intelligence where and when flooding events happen. Mr Marwood advised that after a flooding incident inspections and surveys are conducted and help and advice is provided for residents on how to protect their properties and how to apply for grant funding. The Group noted that the EA are working on future comms and a community App.

The Group expressed their disappointment that Severn Trent Water (STW) had said they could not attend the meeting of Growth and Development Scrutiny. The Group asked what mechanisms are in place to regulate whether the mains network can cope with the increase in sewerage capacity due to housing development and whether the sewerage infrastructure needs to be updated. Mr Goldsmith explained that the regulation process is complex involving legal processes to impose any fines and EA cannot force STW to update the mains network. Mr Goldsmith offered to provide further information after the meeting to the Group about the regulatory process for connecting to mains and issues of capacity. He also advised that there is information on STW's website about capacity across the network. Mr Goldsmith offered to return to a future meeting with technical specialists to provide further insight into particular areas of concern, for example flooding and sewerage. The Group were advised that STW, working with the EA, had recently built a new urban SUD at Mansfield and requested the Group be provided with further details of this scheme.

With regards to planning and development control, at the Growth and Development meeting in September 2022 there was some contradictory information. EA had advised that developers had to ensure there was capacity in the network, however STW stated that developers have a right to connect to the mains which cannot be refused. Mr Goldsmith advised he was under the understanding that a connection to the mains could not be refused, however there is the opportunity for STW to raise strong concerns if there is a concern about capacity. It was suggested STW are invited back to a future meeting of Growth and Development Scrutiny to provide further information on capacity issues, connecting to the mains and best methods of contacting them as members have struggled with this.

Councillor Grocock referred to the Environmental Equality indicators and expressed the Council were doing well compared to other similar authorities and County and regional level and suggested the Council look at an Environmental Improvement Plan in partnership with other agencies, Districts and Boroughs to explore other mechanisms and interventions to create the most impact and also improve the Council's overall biodiversity net gain.

The Service Manager – Economic Growth and Property advised the Group of work being done by the Nottinghamshire wide economic growth group and other partnerships.

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

- a) Reviewed the scrutiny matrix and noted the previous meeting (21 September 2022) and asked questions of the expert witnesses.
- b) Identified areas where further work or further updates are required e.g. communications or engagement between organisations
- c) Requested that Severn Trent Water and the Environment Agency be invited back to a future meeting of Growth and Development Scrutiny.

20 **Connectivity and Communications**

Councillor Combellack had submitted a scrutiny matrix which had been circulated with the report for this item. Councillor Combellack addressed the Group expressing her concerns around broadband and mobile network coverage across the Borough and wanted to understand what opportunities and challenges there are to achieving 100% coverage.

Mr Ian Stoddart, Digital Connectivity Manager at Nottinghamshire County Council delivered a presentation on Nottinghamshire County Council's 'Better Broadband for Nottinghamshire' a multi contract programme that delivered over £31m of broadband network investment across the County, of which Rushcliffe received 16,099 connections. Over 87,000 premises were connected to a fibre

service between 2014-2021 and 83.37% of all Nottinghamshire premises receive gigabit-capable service, with premises in Rushcliffe receiving 80.96% able to access gigabit-capable services and 53.17% able to access a full-fibre broadband service and although behind the County as a whole, the Group were advised these coverage figures are extremely positive.

Mr Stoddart informed the Group of the latest £5bn national programme 'Project Gigabit', a programme to deliver 85% gigabit broadband coverage, with an initial scope of 20,000 premises in Nottinghamshire, 3,412 in Rushcliffe. Mr Stoddart explained that given the nature of civic engineering projects related to broadband delivery it is not expected that delivery will begin until early 2025 and are subject to network design verification and a detailed survey process, including design change and cost confirmation.

Mr Stoddart highlighted the D2N2 'GigaHubs' Project, a Nottinghamshire County Council led project funded by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLHUC), which aims to connect public sector buildings to fast, reliable internet connection.

The Group noted the 4 sites selected for Rushcliffe at:

- Bingham Library
- Cotgrave Library/Cotgrave Hub
- Keyworth Library
- Radcliffe on Trent Library

Mr Stoddart confirmed that a supplier contract for delivery is in place and the survey and design process is underway with services expected to be delivered by March 2026.

With regards to mobile network coverage Mr Stoddart advised the Group of a Digital Pathfinders project which Nottinghamshire County Council have partnered with Birmingham University to collect mobile data in reference to coverage and signal strength across Nottinghamshire by deploying equipment to Nottinghamshire County Council's waste collection vehicles to detect 'not-spots', where coverage is poor. The Group noted that Nottinghamshire County Council would utilise the findings to engage with mobile network operators regarding not-spots and intervention opportunities. Nottinghamshire County Council also has a license agreement in place to provide the use of streetlighting to mobile operators to install 'small cell' equipment with the aim to increase the capacity of their networks.

Mr Stoddart advised the Group that if they are aware of any businesses approaching the Council to discuss mobile infrastructure opportunities that Nottinghamshire County Council would welcome the opportunity to support businesses and provide access to data to highlight any opportunities.

In concluding Mr Stoddart informed the Group of the Public Switched Telephone Network (PSTN), which BT have announced will be switched off and by the end of 2025 their plans to migrate the old analogue telephone network to a fully digital one. In addition, the Group were advised that the Government has committed to work with Ofcom to ensure consumers and affected sectors are protected and prepared for the switch.

The Group asked Mr Stoddart what Rushcliffe Borough Council could be doing to support residents and Nottinghamshire County Council to minimise any disruption and what alternative solutions are available for residents in the meantime. Mr Stoddart explained that full fibre options are the best option going forward and Nottinghamshire County Council will be lobbying hard for improvements, however this will involve huge amounts of capital to make the digital switch cost effective and fit for future use. In respect of alternative back up for residents Openreach (BT) does have a universal service obligation where premises/households can apply directly to Openreach, but data suggests cost to connect to full fibre are high for an individual connection in remote locations.

Councillor Butler asked a specific question relating to mobile networks and its dependency on mobile masts and whether mobile companies would consider sharing masts. Mr Stoddart explained technically this can be done, but the competition between mobile providers does not allow it.

The Chairman thanked officers at Nottinghamshire County Council for the extensive work being done to improve connectivity and communications across the Borough and Nottinghamshire and reminded the Group of the invitation from Nottinghamshire County Council to refer residents broadband and mobile enquiries to the County Council.

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

- a) reviewed the scrutiny matrix and ask questions of the expert witnesses
- b) identified that there were no areas where further work or further updates are required.

21 **Work Programme**

The Group considered its work programme which is subject to scrutiny matrices being submitted by Councillors and Officers.

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

July 2024 (TBC)

- Review of Rushcliffe Oaks Crematorium
- Infrastructure Delivery
- Work Programme

October 2024 (TBC)

- Accessible Housing
- Work Programme

January 2025 (TBC)

March 2025 (TBC)

Action Table – 6 March 2024

Min No.	Action	Officer Responsible
19	The Group asked for further clarity on STW's ability to connect to the main sewerage network and the regulatory powers and process that EA have on this should the mains network not have the capacity and this becomes an issue	Service Manager – Economic Growth and Property and Paul Goldsmith (EA)
19	The Group requested details on the Urban SUD STW have installed in Mansfield	Service Manager – Economic Growth and Property and Paul Goldsmith (EA)
19	The Group welcomed the offer from EA for them to return to a future meeting with technical experts to focus on specific areas	Service Manager – Economic Growth and Property and Paul Goldsmith

The meeting closed at 9.04 pm.

CHAIR