

MINUTES
OF THE MEETING OF THE
GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT SCRUTINY GROUP
WEDNESDAY, 29 JANUARY 2025

Held at 7.00 pm in the Council Chamber, Rushcliffe Arena, Rugby Road, West
Bridgford
and live streamed on Rushcliffe Borough Council's YouTube channel

PRESENT:

Councillors P Matthews (Chair), L Way (Vice-Chair), K Chewings, D Mason,
H Parekh, D Soloman, R Butler and S Calvert

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

C Evans	Head of Economic Growth and Property
Ryder	Economic Growth and Corporate Projects Officer
T Coop	Democratic Services Officer

APOLOGIES:

Councillors S Dellar, C Grocock and R Walker
Councillor Soloman arrived at 7.20pm

10 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

11 Minutes of the Meeting held on 17 July 2024

The minutes of the meeting held on 17 July 2024 were approved as a true record of the meeting and were signed by the Chair.

There had been some officer actions around S106 agreements, guidance on CIL and Deeds of Variation in relation to Town and Parish support, and the officer's response had been provided as a briefing note prior to this meeting. It was also noted these would be included for discussion on the next Town and Parish Forum scheduled for April 2025. In addition, the further information and guidance would be circulated to Town and Parish Council's.

12 Minutes of the meeting held on 17 October 2024

The minutes of the meeting held on 17 October 2024 were approved as a true record of the meeting and were signed by the Chair.

13 The Health of our Town and Village Centres

The Head of Service for Economic Growth and Property delivered a

presentation on the health of the Boroughs town and village centres, highlighting comments submitted by Councillor Williams via a Scrutiny Matrix approved by the Corporate Overview Group.

The report circulated with the agenda provided the Group with an overview of a recent retail review commissioned for each of the Boroughs 7 larger town and village centres. It included current challenges and opportunities and sets out recommendations identified in the review, for areas the Council can focus on in the short, medium and long term.

The report also identified the priorities and actions from the recently published Economic Growth Strategy that have been selected to help support and enhance the offer in the Boroughs town and village centres.

The Head of Service for Economic Growth and Property informed the Group of the high street business support the Council has provided to date, via a combination of Covid19 government support, high street grants and more recently via the UK Shared Prosperity Funding (UKSPF).

The Head of Service for Economic Growth and Property also shared some of the data from the 2023 Retail Reviews commissioned for the Boroughs 7 main town centres at; Bingham, Cotgrave, East Leake, Keyworth, Radcliffe on Trent, Ruddington and West Bridgford, highlighting that overall, it was a positive picture, with low vacancy and a high proportion of independents. It was reported that vulnerability is low to moderate in all town centres excluding West Bridgford where it is reported to be moderate to high.

The Head of Service for Economic Growth and Property explained that as high streets evolve, the vulnerability of some high street businesses e.g. product retail to things like online is greater than others. The reviews assessed the range of businesses in the town centre and gave an overall score for vulnerability.

The Group were asked to consider the recommendations from the retail reviews, including targeted business support, feasibility studies for possible future uses of long-term empty units, establishing formal trader's groups, incubator/pop up space to support start-up businesses and working closely with stakeholder Groups such as landlords to proactively influence the future of our town or village centres.

The Head of Service for Economic Growth and Property referred to the Council's Economic Growth Strategy and Plan and highlighted some of the work being progressed by the Economic Growth Team.

These include:

- Masterplan/vision for West Bridgford and other town and village centres
- Progressing feasibility plans for pedestrianisation of West Bridgford following public realm work
- Establishment of town centre groups including learning from best practice from groups already established in the Borough
- Establishment of landlord forums

- Meeting/workshops/networking with visitor economy businesses, including the hospitality sector and accessibility and training to support this
- Tourism brochure(s) to promote the offer in our town and village centres
- Responding to emerging challenges such as bank closures

The Group were advised that the Council is waiting to hear how much and if any, UKSPF it will receive in 2025/26. The Government have confirmed that the East Midlands County Combined Authority (EMCCA) will receive £25,170,819 and EMCCA have indicated that Borough Council's will receive an allocation of this and have suggested that Districts and Boroughs work on the basis of receiving 60% of the allocation received in 2023/24. It was noted that for Rushcliffe this would be around £980,400 and confirmation of this is expected to be announced at the EMCCA Board meeting on 10 February 2025.

Councillor Butler asked a specific question relating to the UKSPF allocation and whether the Council needs to bid for any funding. The Head of Service for Economic Growth and Property confirmed that the understanding at the moment is that, if any funding is provided, there would not be a bidding process, and that the Council would receive a fixed allocation.

Members of the Group commented on the Retail Reviews from 2023, stating that the data provided in these reports were out of date and felt that figures needed to be updated in order of providing a more realistic view of the Borough's towns and villages and any economic changes that may have occurred.

Councillor Calvert questioned the public realm improvements on Central Avenue and whether a public consultation had taken place and if there was public support. He also asked about the report referencing pedestrianisation and what consultation there had been on that. The Head of Service for Economic Growth and Property explained that there had been a joint accessibility study commissioned by the Nottinghamshire County Council and the Borough Council, to inform this study extensive consultation had been carried out, including with local ward members, and the planned work was identified in the study. The Head of Service for Economic Growth and Property added that it was the ambition of Cabinet to progress the pedestrianisation of Central Avenue, however the initial stage of work would be feasibility studies as and when relevant consultation would be carried out. Funding has been set aside in the Capital programme in 2026/27 to support this ambition. In addition, the Chair raised concerns that this was a significant challenge and a huge cost to the Council and asked whether the decision would be Cabinets alone or would a report be brought back to scrutiny for approval. The Head of Service for Economic Growth and Property explained pedestrianisation work was included in the Council's Economic Growth Strategy and that extensive consultation would apply if any changes were to be made.

Councillor Calvert commented on a Masterplan for West Bridgford and whether this would focus on the current town centre or a wider area to incorporate the proposed new development at Gamston/Tollerton, adding that as West Bridgford did not have a Town Council would there be opportunities for local Councillors to be consulted. The Head of Economic Growth and Property confirmed it would include the wider area and would involve consultation.

Councillor Chewings raised concerns that there were no assessments or comments around bank closures and the lack of banking services in the Boroughs towns and village centres and asked if this was considered to be a missed opportunity. This was echoed by Councillor Soloman and Councillor Butler who also raised their concerns around bank closures and recent publicity regarding Post Office closures too. Members of the Group asked whether there was any feasibility in the Council exploring additional mobile banking or a banking hub. It was noted that Nat West Bank in West Bridgford had given notice of its closure and Councillor Soloman advised that Barclays Bank after its recent closure in West Bridgford was providing a basic counter service from the Library in West Bridgford and suggested that other banks may be interested in doing something similar if contacted.

Councillor Chewings commented on the retail review recommendations and actions that the Council could take to support town and village centres and asked whether there were checks and timeframes in place to see any of the support and incentives the Council has provided has proven successful for business growth. The Head of Service for Economic Growth and Property explained that these were recommendations from the reviews and so part of the work would be considering the feasibility of some including considering if any external funding is available. The Head of Service for Economic Growth and Property added that she would share a Dashboard that includes quarterly and yearly stats on the local economy which she advised will also be fed into the Council's Strategic Growth Boards.

The Chair asked how business grants are measured and whether these have been successful by way of improving and enhancing our town centres. The Group were advised that the application is designed so that a business needs to provide substantive information and data including outputs and outcomes for officers to check before the grant can be awarded.

Councillor Parekh commented on the use of social media to promote the West Bridgford Way and suggested posts need to be kept up to date and refreshed to keep up momentum and public interest. The Head of Service for Economic Growth and Property explained that the team had hoped that local businesses would take ownership of social media streams and that the team would take a look at this area to see if further support is required.

Councillor Mason asked a specific question relating to the Rushcliffe Business Partnership Group (RBP) and whether this was still running, adding that she had been a regular attendee of this Group in the past and found it a helpful networking arena. The Head of Service for Economic Growth and Property advised that this Group does still meet monthly in West Bridgford and Ruddington and has around 40 plus businesses who attend. It was noted that the RBP had tried networking in other towns across the Borough, but this had not been successful. However, the quarterly events are held in venues across the Borough.

Members of the Group wished to see outcomes of any additional areas of work, including feasibility studies around the Public Realm work and banking hubs. The Group also requested that the data be updated to reflect any current

economic changes or trends. Some members of the Group highlighted that much of the funding support appeared to be centred around West Bridgford and felt that smaller towns and villages could benefit from extra funding support opportunities.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Growth and development Scrutiny Group

- a) Review the information and data provided on the town and village centres across the Borough
- b) Considered and identified priorities and initial actions from the Economic Growth Strategy and suggested actions to be prioritised
- c) Prioritise the closure of Banks within the Boroughs town and village centres and research opportunities for mobile banking and/or banking hubs.

14 **Work Programme**

The Chair clarified that the item 'Management of Open Spaces and New Developments' would be discussed at the next Growth and Development Scrutiny Group meeting on 26 March 2025.

The Chair advised the Group that there had been no further proposals for future scrutiny topics and reminded the Group these need to be submitted via a scrutiny matrix and then agreed at the Corporate Overview Group.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Group agreed the work programme as set out below.

26 March 2025

- Management of Open Spaces and New Developments
- Work Programme

Meeting dates for 2025-2026 are to be confirmed at Annual Council on 22 May 2025.

The meeting closed at 8.07 pm.

CHAIR