

Growth and Development Scrutiny Group

Chairman's Foreword

This annual report summarises the main work undertaken by this scrutiny group during 2021/22. I am very pleased to note that despite another challenging year, the business of scrutiny has proceeded as planned and all topics programmed for 2021/22 were considered.

Local communities, businesses, and employers have all been affected in some way by the ongoing effects of the Covid 19 pandemic. However, I am pleased to report that due to the resilience of local communities and the dedication of officers and Councillors, in supporting residents and the local economy we are beginning to see some emerging successes.

The Group has explored the Council's Growth and Development in line with the Council's priorities within the Corporate Strategy, which are:

- Quality of Life – Our resident' quality of life is our priority
- Efficient Services – As an organisation it is always our intention to deliver the best services to our residents in the most efficient way possible
- Sustainable Growth – Rushcliffe is determined to play its part in shaping the future of the Borough, ensuring the needs and aspirations of Rushcliffe residents are met in all future developments
- The Environment – We are fully committed to playing our part in protecting the environment today and enhancing it for future generations

I am confident that our work over the last year has improved residents' quality of life. There have been many areas of strength, balanced against areas where improvement and development are needed.

Going forward we look forward to building on the work of the Growth and Development Scrutiny Group and I wish to thank my colleagues, especially my Vice Chairman, Councillor Richard Butler, for their engagement and support.

Councillor Neil Clarke
Chairman Growth and Development Scrutiny Group



Cllr Neil Clarke
Chairman



Cllr Richard Butler
Vice Chairman

What are we responsible for?

The Growth and Development Scrutiny Group's remit is to consider relevant topics, in line with the Council's priorities, taking into account the Corporate Strategy and those of officers and councillors for inclusion in a work programme agreed by the Corporate Overview Group.

Both Councillors and officers are required to complete a scrutiny matrix to outline a topic they would like to be considered for scrutiny. The matrix summarises the issue of concern as well as the key lines of enquiry for review.

Our work this year

During the year, the Group considered many service areas and issues within its scrutiny role, particularly:

- River Trent Footbridge Crossing
- Cycling Networks in the Borough
- Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Update
- Covid-19 Business Recovery Update
- Tree Conservation
- Planning Communications

River Trent Footbridge Crossing

At its meeting on 14 July 2021, a presentation was delivered by Nottingham City Council advising the Group of the Transforming Cities Funding Programme totalling £161m shared with Derby City Council, of which £40m is to be spent on enhancing the walking and cycling network in Nottingham, including £9m allocated for a new foot/cycling bridge across the River Trent. The Group were advised of Collaborative work being undertaken across the D2N2 area to create a Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP), which would focus on areas the bridge will enhance, including connections to Derby, Nottingham, and local urban connections.

Information was provided on the existing bridges across the River Trent currently used by pedestrians and cyclists at Clifton, Wilford, Trent Bridge and Lady Bay and the proposed new bridge location at Waterside Nottingham. Waterside Nottingham being a regeneration site located in the Trent Basin, connecting to Trent Fields, West Bridgford on the Rushcliffe side and providing commuting and leisure routes through the Waterside site and onto the City Centre and Gedling to the east.

The Group noted that the City Council would continue to engage with stakeholders ahead of formal consultation and public engagement and that the project would require joint working across the City Council, County Council, and the Borough. An estimated timeline and project work programme was provided, including a public exhibition and consultation expected to begin in September/October 2021, followed by a planning application in December 2021/January 2022, with construction expecting to start in autumn 2022 and completion by spring 2023.

The Group were in support of a new pedestrian and cycle bridge over the River Trent and provided comments on the proposal to be included in the response to the consultation exercise.

Cycling Networks

A presentation from Nottinghamshire County Council was delivered to the Group on Cycling in Nottinghamshire, which provided an overview of the County Council's strategic background, funding for cycling, how potential infrastructure improvements are assessed and prioritised and coordinated behaviour change programmes.

The Group were advised that the County Council were reviewing its Strategy Plan for the period 2021-2025, including its Local Transport Plan 2011-2026 and Fourth Implementation Plan 2022/23 which includes the Cycling Strategy Delivery Plan 2016 covering cycling strategic priorities, a Cycling Action Plan and cycling infrastructure priorities.

The Group noted the Boroughs role as a stakeholder consultee to review and coordinate the role of cycling networks within the County Councils Strategy that were within the Boroughs responsibilities, including the role of Rushcliffe when considering cycling infrastructure in town centre improvements and when securing/releasing funding from developer contributions.

The Group were advised of the DfT requirements in respect of infrastructure assessments, which highlighted the D2N2 local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP), an evidence based assessment which demonstrates the need for improvements, whilst sharing the D2N2 strategic objectives for supporting economic growth, tourism, and the visitor economy, addressing transport congestion, climate change, air quality and health deprivation. The Group noted that there is to be a planned public consultation on a draft D2N2 wide infrastructure priority assessment providing the Borough with the potential to influence by acting as a priority consultee.

Further presentations were delivered from Pedals.org and Sustrans, a UK charity for promoting active travel, both highlighting the rapid growth in cycling and bike sales since the Covid pandemic, and why now more than ever it is increasingly more important to improve the cycling network across the Borough and Countywide including the health benefits for greener communities where local authorities actively encourage cycling and walking as a means of moving around.

The Group highlighted that Rushcliffe was a rural Borough and that cycling, for many, as a commute was unrealistic, however the Group were keen to see improvements to cycle connectivity for trains and bus services and noted the increase in the uptake of cycling for leisure purposes and the impact of this on rural roads, where improvements could be made.

At its meeting in January 2022 the Group were presented with an update of emerging issues relating to cycling and were asked to consider the inclusion of walking in making recommendations for future action.

The Group noted that the Borough Council would work in partnership with the County Council as the transport authority to support with any bids for government funding.

Members were encouraged to see the Borough taking an active role in enhancing residents transport choices and the options for a healthier and more sustainable approach to transport connectivity and accessibility.

The Group supported the inclusion of both walking and cycling in any future action.

Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) – Update

A presentation was delivered to the Group which updated members on the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL), which was adopted by Council on 7 October 2019. Members were reminded that the levy is a charge applied to certain types of development to help fund infrastructure across the Borough.

Members noted that the levy is intended to address the cumulative effect of development across the Borough and is a fixed rate charge based on floor space and is charged on retail and residential developments at rates set out in the published Charging Schedule. The adoption of CIL was supported by infrastructure evidence, financial viability evidence alongside the Local Plan Part 2.

The Group were advised of the Neighbourhood proportions of CIL funds under the CIL regulation 59A, whereby the Borough Council has to pass a proportion of levy receipts to the Town and Parish Council's at 15% capped, or 25% where covered by a Neighbourhood Plan. The Group were also advised that subject to cabinet approval an additional proportion of the CIL would be made available to areas with no Neighbourhood Plan, to provide a consistent level of funding across the Borough.

Members noted that the Neighbourhood proportion is not limited to items within the infrastructure list and can be spent on a wider range of projects, provided they address the demands that a new development places in that area. It was also noted that West Bridgford is covered by a different element of CIL which would be controlled by the Borough Council with consideration by members through the /special Expenses Group.

The Group were informed of the charging structure for collecting CIL funds and were advised that a viability exercise was completed which looked at the local plan infrastructure delivery plan and standard assumptions using local information, such as affordable housing, legal fees, house sales and land values, these were then examined by an independent examiner before being adopted by Council in 2019.

The Group noted that CIL funding would be difficult to predict and cannot be guaranteed until developments have commenced and that CIL would be used as a top up where there are funding gaps.

The Group endorsed the referral of the CIL allocation and spend process to Cabinet which included the additional amount of Strategic CIL available to areas without a Neighbourhood Plan. In addition, the Group recommended, that due to the complexity of the Framework document and in particular regarding Parish Council's and Parish Meetings the Group suggested a guidance document be produced to assist Parish Council's and Parish Meetings to understand the CIL procedure.

Covid-19 Business Recovery

The Group were presented with an update on the Covid 19 Business Recovery, which provided data across the D2N2 authorities, including furlough and self-employment claims, unemployment claims, job vacancies and business closures, as reported in June 2021.

The Group were provided with information relating to the health of the Boroughs high streets, including Bingham, Cotgrave, East Leake, Keyworth, Radcliffe on Trent, Ruddington and West Bridgford. Measurements were reported that included vacant premises, businesses being developed or being for sale and footfall during January, April, and August 2021.

Members noted that footfall had increased since the lockdown restrictions were lifted in early 2021, and then again between April and August 2021.

The Group were informed of the progress and ongoing work being carried out by the Economic Growth team and the collaborative work with Rushcliffe Business Partnership, including virtual networking sessions. In addition, the Group were reminded that a dedicated Covid-19 business support webpage had been created which had attracted around 40,000 views, providing assistance with business rate grants totalling over £35.3m.

The Group were advised of a number of initiatives officers had delivered using Reopening High Streets Safely Funding (RHSSF), these included the Government led initiative 'Eat Out to Help Out' and communication campaigns targeting local businesses such as 'We Are Open' and 'Shop Local Shop Safe'. In addition, two consultants funded by the RHSSF were employed to provide expert advice and business support. The Council also appointed High Street Ambassadors to support the reopening of the Borough's high streets providing a visible presence to reassure the public and during November and December 2020 the Council developed a Rushcliffe gift voucher for residents to spend in participating businesses across the Borough, temporary free parking and free parking after 3pm in Council owned car parks and a digital grant for up to £1000 to provide high street businesses with financial support to develop their online presence.

The Group were also informed that an enhanced events programme in West Bridgford had been very successful, with the return of Taste of Rushcliffe, Proms in the Park, outdoor theatre and cinema and family fun days.

Members noted that footfall was measured using guidance supplied by the Welcome Back Funding (WBF) formally called Reopening High Streets Safely Funding (RHSSF). It was also noted that leisure centre activity had seen some increase and that the Council's leisure centre provider had reported that around 70% of users had returned to the centre.

The Group welcomed the work carried out by officers to support businesses in responding to the impacts of Covid-19 and endorsed the proposed future activities and

suggested that officer explore alternative opportunities to support businesses in Rushcliffe.

Tree Conservation

At its meeting in January 2022 the Group were presented a report highlighting the Council's management of trees, tree protection in the Borough through conservation and tree protection orders (TPO's) and controls on development sites.

The Group were advised that the Government guidelines state that TPO's should be used to protect selected trees and woodlands if their removal would have significant negative impact on the local environment and its enjoyment by the public.

The Group commended the Council for its extensive tree planting of over 2500 trees having been planted across the Borough. The Group also noted the noticeable loss of trees due to disease, particularly amongst Ash trees and asked the Council to consider widening its diversity of trees to prevent the spread of disease thus allowing biodiversity to adapt to climate and environmental changes.

The Group supported the drafting of a tree protection policy and tree management policy which would set out the Council's role, function, and priorities, including appraisal of planning applications and the investigation to strengthening protection and enforcement.

The Group also supported the investigation into a feasibility of an online mapping system which could be used to show protected trees within the Borough.

The Group requested that a letter be sent from the Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Communities and Climate Change to the Secretary of State for levelling up, Housing and Communities for improved legislation to take into account climate change, biodiversity and to include the protection of hedgerows.

Planning Communications

A presentation was delivered to the Group to address the concerns in respect of the planning service standards and in particular the response to the increased workload being experienced recently and the various concerns regarding procedural issues in terms of communication and consultation on planning applications.

The Group were informed that the Service Standards had been developed to bring about improvements in service delivery and to provide a more structured approach for communications with applicants, agents, and councillors. It was noted that these Service Standards aim to bring greater transparency to the process and to ensure that applications were processed efficiently and within Government expected timescales.

The Group were advised that the Council had strengthened its approach to the issue of enforcement notices and that planning officers work alongside other neighbourhood services to address issues with developments that cause a nuisance and were assured that officers would take action where appropriate to do so.

The Group were advised that since the new Service Standards were introduced in November 2021 a number of agency staff had been employed at short notice in periods of high demand to provide sufficient resources to handle the volume of planning applications and to clear any back log. It was noted that positive feedback had been received on working conditions offered and the range and variety of planning applications handled. It was noted that the process would be reviewed and streamlined once the team was fully staffed.

The Group had questioned whether the resource and recruitment issues had affected the issue of enforcement notices and were pleased to note that rapid engagement with the developer concerned avoided the need to issue an enforcement notice and that enforcement cases were inspected within one day of notification and were prioritised, with cases in conservation areas receiving a higher priority.

The Group discussed the ongoing role of the Growth and Development Scrutiny Group in overseeing their arrangements for planning communications. The Chairman asked that Members of the Group feed their comments through him and the Vice Chairman so that they could be raised with senior officers.

The Group supported the updated Service Standards and the continuation of the current practices for the publicity of and consultations on planning applications, and in considering the issue of ongoing monitoring, the Group agreed that the Service Standards be reviewed in line with feedback received and in consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair as well as other Members.

Member Panels

The Group did not establish any Member Panels this year.

Call-ins

The Group did not discuss any call-ins this year.

Looking forward to the year ahead

Following the review of the Council's scrutiny functions in 2021/22 all members of Growth and Development Scrutiny are looking forward to a comprehensive programme of scrutiny topics that will deliver economic growth and ensure sustainable, prosperous, and thriving communities.