



Growth and Development Scrutiny Group

Wednesday, 4 October 2023

Review of Growth Boards

Report of the Director Growth and Development

1. Purpose of report

- 1.1. Following the report to Cabinet in June 2023 which outlined the process for the review of Growth Boards, this report presents findings from the survey work completed, wider context and considerations and options for the future of the Growth Boards. Feedback is sought from the Group to inform a further report to Cabinet setting out the proposed structure for the new Boards.
- 1.2. The June 2023 report to Cabinet included a lot of the background to the establishment of the Growth Boards and the previous reviews carried out, most recently in 2019. This report focusses on the review itself and some proposed models for the future of the Boards.
- 1.3. The report refers to Growth Boards throughout as this is what these groups are currently called. The focus going forward is the priorities for economic growth and desired outcomes for local businesses and residents. The Council will need to have in place the most appropriate structure in order to identify and achieve the objectives.

2. Recommendation

It is RECOMMENDED that Growth and Development Scrutiny Group:

- a) Consider the priorities, contained in the report (paragraph 4.20), for any future Boards and suggest areas of focus and any additional priorities
- b) Based on the preferred option (from paragraph 4.27) set out in the report make a recommendation to Cabinet for the new structure of the Growth Boards.

3. Reasons for Recommendation

- 3.1. It has been identified by Cabinet that a review of the existing Growth Boards is required and to help inform this process they have requested that the Growth and Development Scrutiny Committee have the opportunity to inform the outcome of the review.
- 3.2. The feedback from the Scrutiny Group on the recommendations will be used to inform the subsequent Cabinet report later in 2023.

4. Supporting Information

Background

- 4.1. As set out in the report to Cabinet in June 2023, the Growth Boards were established in 2015 and have been reviewed twice since then (in 2017 and 2019). These resulted in some changes to the Boards including the addition of new Boards. There are currently six Growth Boards:
- Strategic Growth Board – meets quarterly
 - Bingham Growth Board – meets quarterly
 - East Leake Growth Board – meets twice a year
 - Fairham Growth Board – meets quarterly
 - Radcliffe on Trent Growth Board – meets twice a year
 - West Bridgford Growth Board – meets quarterly.
- 4.2. In addition, there is the Newton Community Partnership Board and the Sharphill Stakeholder Group which were both established more recently and have a very clear focus on those development sites. The Boards all have terms of reference and an action plan in place. All of the Boards are chaired by a Cabinet Member, supported by a Director and the Economic Growth Team who provide project management support delivering follow up actions/activity identified in meetings.
- 4.3. The Boards have delivered a lot since they were established in 2015 and the remit of some has inevitably changed over time due to the challenges and opportunities in the respective areas. In some cases, this has meant that discussions that are already/should be taking place elsewhere are repeated and some Board members disengage due to the change in focus and the lack of specific interest for them. It is timely to review the Boards again in light of the above, the impacts of Covid-19 and, more recently, the cost of living pressures.
- 4.4. Appendix A is the scrutiny matrix which triggered this report to scrutiny, it is included for reference to ensure that the key lines of enquiry are addressed in the report and presentation at the Scrutiny Group meeting. As Councillors will note, the report has been structured to address the points identified in the matrix.

Additional and related areas of work

- 4.5. As set out in the June Cabinet report, when considering the review of the Growth Boards it is important to include other related areas of work for the Economic Growth Team as well as other departments of the Council. The detail of this can be found in the Cabinet report and as a reminder for Councillors, this includes:
- Newton Community Partnership Board – recently established with a clear focus on the Newton Strategic Urban Extension (SUE) and not considered as part of this review

- Sharphill Stakeholders meetings – established with a clear focus on the Sharphill development in Edwalton as an SUE and not considered as part of this review
 - Fairham Growth Board – clear focus on the Fairham Pastures SUE and not considered as part of this review.
 - Ratcliffe on Soar Parish Forum
 - UK Shared Prosperity and Rural England Prosperity Funding
 - Rushcliffe Business Partnership
 - High street/town centre forums
 - Commercial developer forum
 - Bingham car parking stakeholder meeting as identified in the report to Cabinet in September 2023
 - Big Business Carbon Club.
- 4.6. The UK Shared Prosperity Funding has enabled additional business support activity commissioned by the Council. There is now a comprehensive business support offer including digital high street support, energy efficiency/low carbon support, general business support and grant funding allocations. The Economic Growth Team work closely with businesses across the Borough and their more active engagement in future growth boards would help to enhance this work and the offer.

Existing Boards terms of reference review

- 4.7. Each Growth Board has terms of reference (TOR) and these have been reviewed to consider areas of commonality and variation. The review also allows the opportunity to fully consider if each of the Boards are meeting/have met their original objectives. The Strategic Growth Board TOR were not reviewed alongside the local growth boards as the role of that board is not comparable.
- 4.8. The review of the TOR was carried out on Bingham, East Leake, Radcliffe on Trent and West Bridgford Growth Boards and it found the following areas of consistency:
- All Boards are chaired by a member of RBC Cabinet
 - The Portfolio Holder for Economic Growth is a core member of each Board
 - East Leake, Radcliffe and Bingham have Parish Councillor and Clerk representation and in WB this is covered with the inclusion of 2 ward Councillors as well as the chair of the Local Area Forum
 - A lot of the objectives are broadly the same focussing on developing plans to support the future of the area/town centre
 - All report into the Strategic Growth Board on a quarterly basis.

Areas of variation include:

- East Leake includes 2 ward Councillors whereas the other Boards TOR operating in parish council areas did not have them listed as board members. Bingham and Radcliffe did previously have ward Councillors included however this was changed in the review in 2019 to try and

encourage a more diverse range of attendees and have less of a Council focus.

- The meeting frequency is different and again this was a change implemented following the 2019 review (meeting frequency included at 4.1)
- The East Leake TOR have a very specific list of priorities which were developed with the Growth Board members. These reflect the challenges in East Leake created by the housing development that has happened in the area. Whilst these are more specific many of them are covered by the broader objectives outlined in the other TOR.

4.9. The variation of TOR have broadly arisen as an outcome of previous reviews and were made to reflect the changing focus/demands of the different Boards. Therefore, these differences are appropriate and an inevitable part of the development of Boards that have been established for an extended period of time.

4.10. The terms of reference can be found on the Borough Council [website](#).

4.11. The Boards have achieved a lot of outcomes since they were established as outlined in the report to Cabinet in June 2023. These projects are in line with the objectives of the Boards and have been developed based on the action plans in place for each area.

4.12. The Boards often have broad objectives that remain flexible to be responsive to local challenges, as such some areas of work are long-term and/or ongoing and consideration should be given to whether:

- the Boards (considering the wider audience) are the right place for some of these discussions
- actions can be picked up elsewhere and led by the most appropriate organisation e.g. health, parish council etc.
- a more focussed, task and finish groups for specific projects may be a more appropriate way to achieve outcomes.

4.13. The Boards have worked very well to bring key stakeholders in an area to work together. This has meant that the relationships now exist in these areas and priority projects are being progressed often through discussions outside of the Board.

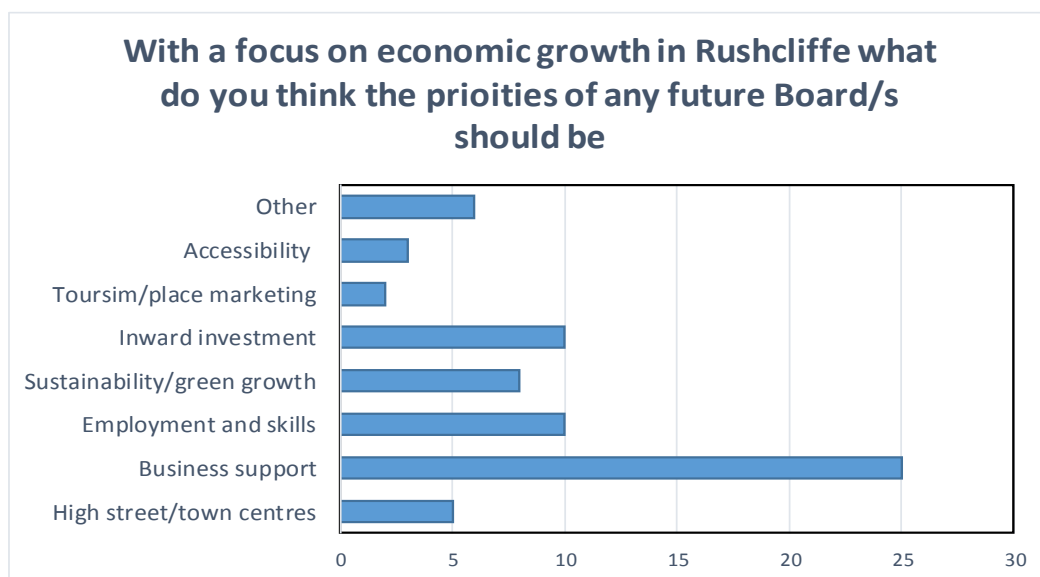
4.14. In most Boards there has been a struggle to engage and maintain local business representation who are key to informing discussions and plans. This could be for a number of reasons, but might be due to the formal nature of the Boards, the timing of them and the topics covered can often be more Council/public sector focussed rather than business/economic growth.

Survey

4.15. Following the Cabinet report, the Economic Growth Team have conducted a survey to gain views on the current Growth Boards and input into priorities for future boards. Two surveys were created:

- one which went to all existing board members and all Rushcliffe Borough Councillors (72 recipients and 14 responses received)
- the other went to around 2500 local businesses – mix of high street and non-high street businesses (44 responses received)
- in addition, a ‘straw poll’ was carried out at Rushcliffe Business Partnership events and networking asking about priorities for economic growth in the Borough, this received 25 responses.

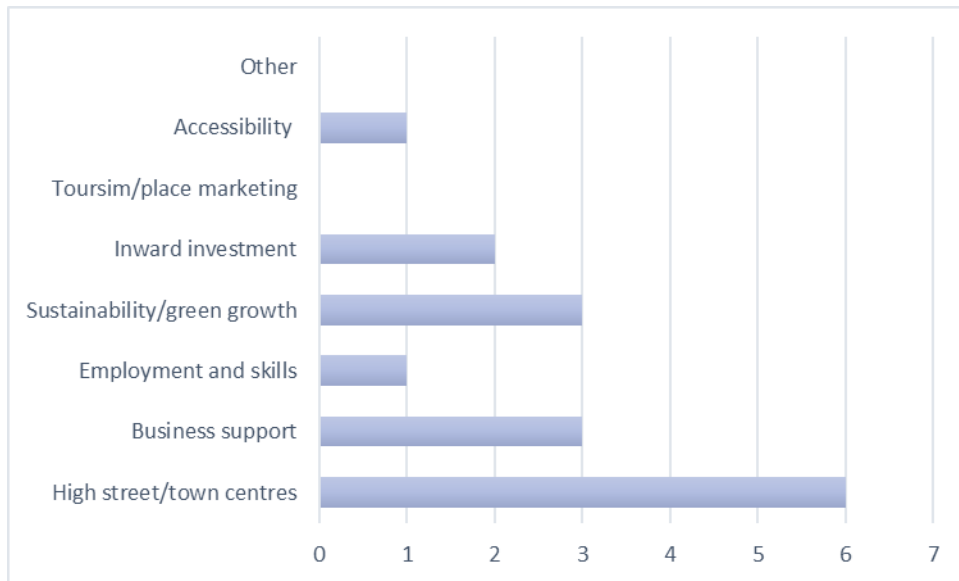
4.16. The questionnaire sent to businesses was shorter and focussed on the future priorities rather than the Growth Boards themselves, as most would not have been previously involved with them. The results of the survey can be found at Appendix B. The 25 responses received to the straw poll have been added to the question about priorities for ease of reference. Therefore, the collective responses from businesses showed the following results:



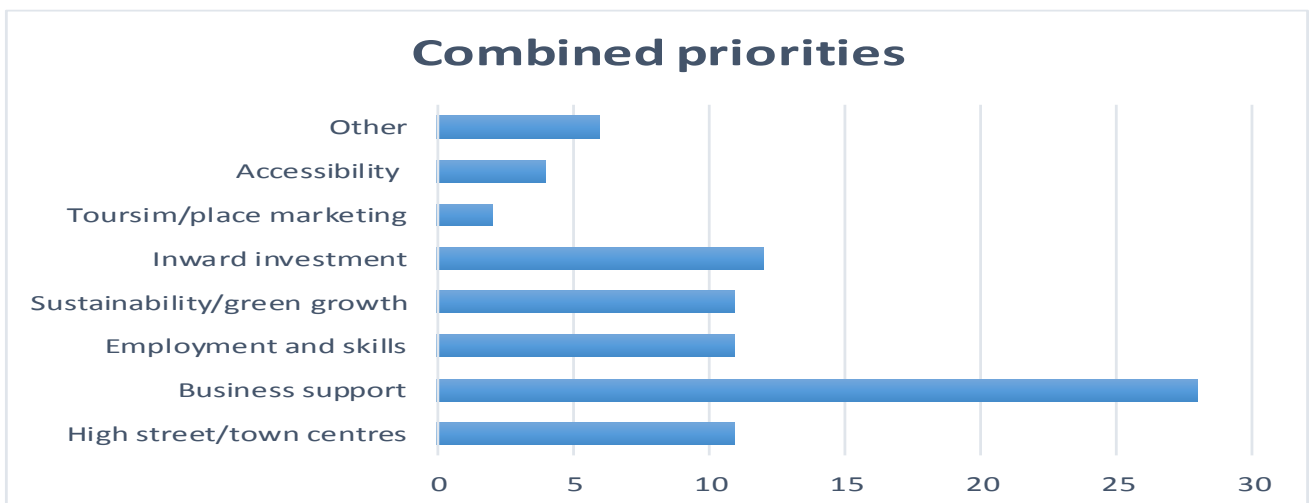
4.17. The survey that was shared with existing growth board members and Councillors included more questions and reference to Growth Boards. The results of this can be found at appendix C. The survey received 14 responses from the 72 people it was sent to and the majority of those were from existing growth board members.

4.18. Based on the feedback, most had found the Growth Boards useful with some comments about needing to engage high street businesses more and the need to refresh strategic objectives. The majority of respondents had no view either way about the proposal for the future of the Growth Boards which was included within the survey introduction (details of proposal below). It was felt it was important to share an option within the survey to gain some feedback on a potential new structure.

4.19. In terms of priorities for the future focus of economic growth activity the responses were:



4.20. The results of both sets of responses to the question about priorities have been combined and is reflected in the following graph:



4.21. As the above graph shows the priority which received the most votes is business support with inward investment, sustainability/green growth, employment and skills and high streets and town centres all receiving similar amounts of votes. Whilst this is not a definitive list and overall response rates were relatively low, it does provide some useful feedback to consider when considering future membership and terms of reference of growth boards.

4.22. It is clear from the survey results that those that responded found value in the Growth Boards, however based on the identified priorities for economic growth, it may be that the existing boards do not have the right objectives, membership etc to deliver on those priorities going forward. The review therefore needs to consider the most effective way to ensure a focus on identified priorities whilst acknowledging other ongoing areas of work.

Retail review

- 4.23. In 2016, the Council commissioned some retail reviews to help inform the work of the local Growth Boards. Earlier this year, the Council requested these reviews be revisited using UKSPF funding in order to assess the current health of our high streets and to suggest ideas for how the Council and its partners can offer support going forward. These reports have not yet been finalised but there are some initial findings which can be shared.
- 4.24. Some key findings from the review of the high streets (Bingham, Cotgrave, East Leake, Keyworth, Radcliffe on Trent, Ruddington and West Bridgford) are:
- Vacancy rates are low compared to regional and national averages
 - There are a higher proportion of service and leisure businesses than the regional and national averages
 - Average footfall per month ranges from 86,000 (Keyworth) to 1.3m (West Bridgford)
 - The number of independents is high in all town centres ranging from 46% in West Bridgford to 82% in Ruddington.
- 4.25. The reviews identify some opportunities for supporting the town centres, some of these are specific to a particular town centre and some are suggestions to be implemented across the Borough. Some of the ideas for initiatives across the Borough include:
- Landlord engagement campaign
 - Business support programmes
 - Local collaboration
 - High street beautification
 - Sustainability/green initiatives
 - Embrace digital integration
 - Encourage adaptive reuse of vacant space.
- 4.26. The outcomes of the retail reviews provide some opportunities for further discussion/development with relevant stakeholders as required.

Proposal for the future of the Growth Boards

- 4.27. When considering the future proposal for the Growth Boards it is important to reflect on the purpose of the Boards and what is considered to be a priority moving forward. The focus of the Boards has naturally drifted over time and the review needs to ensure the revised structure avoids that, by taking a more flexible 'task and finish' approach, governed by the Strategic Growth Board. As a reminder this was the original purpose of the Boards as reflected in the terms of reference:

In order to ensure that Rushcliffe delivers the required future growth it is necessary to adopt a strategic approach with clear economic priorities being identified in partnership with our collaborative partners. It is important to ensure appropriate external expertise and knowledge is used to shape and

inform the Local Growth Boards' work. This is likely to be determined by the type and nature of the matter being considered.

- 4.28. In addition, this report has referred to Growth Boards throughout as this is what these meetings are currently called, however, the question is about what the Council need to have in place to deliver on the priorities for economic growth and therefore outcomes for local businesses and residents. The focus is on what the Council is trying to achieve, not the structure, which should follow.
- 4.29. As referred to earlier in the report, a preferred future model for the Growth Boards was included in the survey which was shared with existing Growth Board members and Councillors. This preferred model was that there are Boards which are established (some which already exist) which focus on the strategic development sites in the Borough. This would therefore include:
- Bingham
 - Fairham (already in place)
 - Newton (already in place)
 - Sharpill (already in place although may require additional representation e.g., developers to align with other)
 - Gamston.
- 4.30. The focus on these strategic housing sites is important to ensure developments are delivered in the right way and engage with local communities to ensure new residents are integrated into existing communities. For information the housing numbers on the above sites are:
- Newton – 550 homes
 - Edwalton – 1650 homes
 - Bingham – 1050 home
 - Fairham – 3000 homes
 - Gamston – 4000 homes.
- 4.31. These Boards would have very clear objectives which would focus on the delivery of the housing and employment on the sites. Whilst they may operate for a number of years, due to size of the sites, they would still be considered 'task and finish' groups as there is a clear objective/outcome to be achieved from the Board's work.
- 4.32. In addition, it is proposed to have a Strategic Board that would have an agenda focussed on identified priorities such as high street/town centre, business support etc. Its role would be to set out the vision/plan for work to then be undertaken with relevant stakeholders between meetings. This could therefore include 'task and finish' groups being established to focus on an identified issue/area etc. This would ensure groups were established with clear objectives and therefore could operate for a period of time and then cease.
- 4.33. This preferred approach would support the development of an Economic Growth Strategy for Rushcliffe, an emerging priority proposed to be included in the Corporate Strategy. This is becoming increasingly important with

proposals for a Mayoral Combined authority being developed to ensure the Council has a clear set of priorities for the economic growth of the Borough.

- 4.34. To complement this, the Council would maintain existing relationships with the 6 largest town and parish councils with meetings approx. bi-annually to discuss local priorities and provide support where required including arranging meetings with other stakeholders on identified issues. The following diagram illustrates the preferred option:



- 4.35. This approach would ensure focus is maintained on the strategic sites, the priorities identified in this review could be addressed through the Strategic Growth Board and the local work would continue with parish councils ensuring ongoing communication and additional support as required. In addition to this, the Economic Growth Team will continue with other areas of work including building relationships with local businesses including those on and off the high street.

- 4.36. This option would mean:

- East Leake Growth Board no longer meet – as outlined above issues that arise can still be dealt with via more focussed groups. For example, the Integrated Care Partnership have now arranged monthly meetings of identified stakeholders to progress the health centre development project
- Bingham Growth Board would no longer meet in its current format – this would switch its focus to the development site. In addition there is the soon to be established Bingham car parking group, supported by the Borough Council.
- Radcliffe on Trent Growth Board no longer meet - as outlined above issues that arise can still be dealt with via more focussed groups.
- West Bridgford Growth Board no longer meet - as outlined above issues that arise can still be dealt with via more focussed groups.

- 4.37. Other options that have been considered as a part of the review are set out in the following table:

Option (option 1 is the one detailed above)	Detail	Strengths	Weaknesses
Option 2	Growth Boards remain as they are	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continued focus and stakeholder engagement on projects • Boards are established 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In many cases projects have separate groups discussing them or there are more appropriate forum for these discussions with the right stakeholders around the table e.g. Bingham car park group as proposed at Cabinet in September and East Leake Health Centre meeting • Poor attendance from some important stakeholders e.g. business • A review of TOR would be required to attempt to attract members back and ensure focus remains.
Option 3	Some of the existing Boards remain e.g. East Leake	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continued focus and stakeholder engagement on projects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As above • Additional resource pressure to support existing and new Boards • Wide remit makes delivery of outcomes challenging and risks duplication of discussion e.g. town/parish council.
Option 4	New local boards are established e.g. Keyworth and Ruddington	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunity for development of projects in areas that have not previously had a growth board 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Additional resource pressure to support existing and new Boards • Based on experience a more flexible and less formal structure may work better acknowledging existing groups in an area and better complementing that rather than duplicating. • The existing growth board funding is already available for these other areas and so projects could be developed without the need for wider discussion/meetings. • Preferred approach allows for task and finish groups as required.
Option 4	All Boards cease with no additional boards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resources redeployed to focus on other areas of economic growth work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Removes opportunity to enable more coordinated planning/project development on economic growth priorities • Local issues/voice not being heard • Important work of Growth Boards lost and impact on relationships with stakeholders.

4.38. It may be that the Scrutiny Group has other proposals to be considered and this is something for further discussion.

5. Risks and Uncertainties

5.1. If the existing Boards are maintained, there is a risk that the low level of engagement from some will continue and therefore the valuable contribution they can make to plans will be lost. This is being mitigated by carrying out this review and proposing alternative options for the future of the Boards.

5.2. With any new Boards established there is a risk that the right people/organisations will not attend. This will be mitigated by the right objectives being established at the outset and a focus on delivering outcomes. The revised proposal focuses on more task and finish groups/work rather than Boards that continue to meet for extended periods of time when focus/interest can lapse.

5.3. There is a risk that local relationships will be eroded due to the removal of regular meetings. This is mitigated by the proposal to continue regular dialogue and arrange meetings with additional stakeholders as required. This suggestion was supported by a respondent to the survey who suggested more flexible meeting dates and response to issues as they arise may be a better approach.

6. Implications

6.1. Financial Implications

- In 2022 an allocation of £100,000 was made to support the work of the Strategic Growth Board. To date £50,433 of this has been committed with £30,849 spent and £49,567 remaining. Further funding is likely to be sought from in-year budget efficiencies, via Strategic Growth Board and ultimately Cabinet approval as existing budgets are utilised.

6.2. Legal Implications

There are no legal implications associated with this report.

6.3. Equalities Implications

There are no equalities implications associated with this report.

6.4. Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 Implications

There are no crime and disorder implications associated with this report.

6.5. Bio-Diversity Net Gain

There are no bio-diversity implications associated with this report.

7. Link to Corporate Priorities

The Environment	The Council is committed to sustainable growth and supporting the environment and Growth Boards will operate within this context.
Quality of Life	The Growth Boards' terms of reference demonstrate the range of areas of focus for the boards all of which link to supporting good quality of life for our residents including town centres, infrastructure, education and health.
Efficient Services	The Council has finite financial and staff resources and so needs to work in the most efficient way in relation to the Growth Boards
Sustainable Growth	The Growth Boards' focus has been on supporting the sustainable growth of the Borough, working with stakeholders to create plans delivering outcomes for the Borough's businesses and communities.

8. Recommendations

It is RECOMMENDED that Growth and Development Scrutiny Group:

- a) Consider the priorities, contained in the report (paragraph 4.20), for any future Boards and suggest areas of focus and any additional priorities
- b) Based on the preferred option (from paragraph 4.27) set out in the report make a recommendation to Cabinet for the new structure of the Growth Boards.

For more information contact:	Leanne Ashmore Director of Development and Economic Growth LAshmore@rushcliffe.gov.uk
Background papers available for Inspection:	Growth Board Review Report to Cabinet June 2023
List of appendices:	Appendix A – scrutiny matrix Appendix B – business survey results Appendix C – growth board and councillor survey results