

Growth and Development Scrutiny Group

Chairman's Foreword

This annual report summarises the main work undertaken by this scrutiny group during 2024/25 focusing on the impact of scrutiny. I am very pleased to note that the business of scrutiny has proceeded as planned and all topics programmed for 2024/25 were considered.

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

- Overseeing significant projects contributing towards growth in the Borough to ensure deliverables are met and growth-related outcomes achieved
- Scrutinising infrastructure development which acts as a catalyst for growth in the Borough to ensure such developments progress in a timely fashion and any obstructive barriers are removed or negotiated
- Reviewing the growth in demand for Council services ensuring all residents can access the services they need in a timely and cost-efficient manner
- Considering projects and initiatives to promote economic vibrancy, local democracy and community leadership within local towns and villages contributing towards the overall Council goal of creating Great Place and Great Lifestyle
- Reviewing the Council's policies and strategies as appropriate prior to adoption.

Councillor Phill Matthews
Chairman Growth and Development Scrutiny



Cllr Phill Matthews
Chairman



Cllr Lesley Way
Vice Chair

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 request to outline a topic they would like to be considered for scrutiny. The request 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:

- Review of Rushcliffe Oaks Crematorium
- Infrastructure Delivery
- Accessible Housing (Joint meeting with Communities Scrutiny Group)
- Health of our Town and Village Centres
- Management of Open Spaces

Review of Rushcliffe Oaks Crematorium

At its meeting on 19 July 2023, the Group had agreed that a review of Rushcliffe Oaks was brought back to Growth and Development Scrutiny in order that the Group could capture and comment on the first 12 months in business.

At its meeting on 17 July 2024 the Group received a presentation from the Rushcliffe Oaks Manager, which provided an update on the businesses progress including:

- The number of services held in its first year and financial information in respect of income generated compared with target income and projected income.
- The number of services had steadily increased in comparison to the previous year
- Memorialisation sales had initially been slow but with the opening of the bottom third of the site to include a wildflower meadow, memorialisation sales were expected to increase
- Feedback had been sought from local funeral directors saying that the services provided were professional and welcoming, accommodating all types of services, faiths and also included a comfort dog which had proved popular
- Competition, Communications and Marketing had involved visiting other funeral businesses to establish how best to share news, adverts in hospital bereavement brochures and quarterly newsletters to local funeral directors. The crematorium had also held two Open Days which had been very well attended.

- A visit from 34 delegates from South Korea to observe and learn about the carbon neutral technology and the sites biodiversity

The Group agreed to:	Progress Update – June 2025:
Review and provide comment on the actions taken in response to their suggestions at the Scrutiny Group in July 2023.	Councillors were pleased to hear updates on the work that had been done following the last report to scrutiny including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mapping of Funeral Directors and visits to them • Communications • Feedback survey with Funeral Directors after one year of operating
Identify new opportunities to further promote and develop the offer at Rushcliffe Oaks	Councillors supported proposals presented. A further update will be provided to G&D Scrutiny after Rushcliffe Oaks has been operating for 5 years.

Infrastructure Delivery

The Group had previously considered reports presented to it in October 2023 relating to Infrastructure Delivery via Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) and Section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (s106) which had raised further questions.

At its meeting on 17 July 2024 the Group received a presentation to provide answers to the questions raised around:

- Infrastructure Triggers and what measures are in place to track and enforce developers to deliver the infrastructure agreed
- Delays in Infrastructure Delivery Programmes and how the Council engages with Communities and Town and Parish Council's
- Changes to an Infrastructure Delivery Programme and the role of the Borough Council
- How the Council engages with local stakeholders, including Town and Parish Council's and how this can be improved
- Reflecting on lessons learned through the delivery of existing infrastructure in the Borough as a result of housing growth

The Group discussion that followed covered:

- The need to engage Town and Parish Council's at the consultation stage of any new development and to provide information on s106 and CIL funding at a future Town and Parish Forum
- The need for Councillors to be able to scrutinise and monitor infrastructure delivery and feedback information to their respective town and parish councils on infrastructure projects

- Deeds of Variation and whether these could be summarised to provide town and parishes with details of variations and whether a town and parish councils following agreement of a variation
- The excellent stakeholder and community engagement that had taken place for the Fairham development

The Group agreed to:	Progress Update – June 2025:
Consider and comment on the infrastructure Monitoring report that would be brought to Growth and Development Scrutiny on an annual basis	<p>The Annual Infrastructure Statement (IFS) is published in December each year to cover the previous financial year. The IFS was circulated to all Councillors in December 2025 as well as being published.</p> <p>Councillors may propose future items on particular aspects of infrastructure delivery and monitoring.</p>

Accessible Housing – Joint meeting with Communities Scrutiny Group

At the joint meeting with Communities Scrutiny Group on 17 October 2024, Councillor Matthews was appointed Chair and Councillor Plant Vice-Chair.

Councillor Thomas presented her scrutiny request on Accessible Housing and her reasons for submission as follows:

- Adaptation of existing housing
- Adaptation of new housing being built
- Disabled Facilities Grant funding

The joint scrutiny group received a presentation from the Strategic Housing Manager and the Planning Policy Manager which provided an overview of some of the key features around accessible housing. The Group discussion covered:

- Registered providers making a financial contribution towards adaptations in their properties and laws or regulations to make them contribute
- Viability considerations in relation to Greater Nottinghamshire Strategic Plan, land charges, the Local Plan Policy process and costs to developers in delivering adapted housing
- Nottinghamshire County Council's top up budget and the Boroughs Accessible Housing allocation being the lowest locally when the Council delivered a high number of adaptations
- The application process and delivery of work for adaptations including community awareness and understanding of the process and how this could be improved
- The national policy regarding Disabled Facility Grants (DFG) and local authority top ups

As well as the recommendations provided by officers the Group made the following suggestions:

- Increase the supply of accessible and adapted homes, including wheelchair user dwellings
- Advocate for an increase in funding relative to local need to address the current funding disparities
- Review of the customer pathway and exploration of joined up systems to create efficiencies and risk sharing
- Cross sector investment (health & social care) to reduce demand on health care systems and enable people to remain independent at home

The Joint Scrutiny Group agreed to:	Progress Update – June 2025:
<p>Comment on the information provided by officers to enhance the provision of accessible housing; and</p>	<p>Approved the reintroduction of discretionary grants of up to £10,000 per case.</p> <p>Amend existing policies to support Exceptional & Compelling Cases.</p> <p>Phased RBC efficiency savings funding of £200,000 over four years to support ongoing initiatives.</p> <p>Initiate a pilot programme using uncommitted in-year funds across 7 District/Borough Councils to assist councils facing local needs shortfalls (subject to each LA's governance).</p> <p>Countywide Housing Subgroup to engage with all Registered Providers to address DFG funding challenges and consider financial contributions towards property adaptations.</p> <p>Publication of the final draft Greater Nottingham Strategic Plan including new policy standards for accessible housing. The draft plan and its policies are due to be considered by planning inspector before it can be finalised and implemented</p> <p>Overall, progress aligns with scrutiny recommendations to enhance accessible housing and optimise resource use.</p>

Explored actions that the Council could take to meet the housing needs of residents with disabilities	<p>Use of the Council's Capital Grant to increase accessible and adapted housing, aiming for higher standards in S106 affordable housing schemes.</p> <p>Ongoing lobbying of central Government for increased funding, resulting in additional DFG funding for 2024-25 and 2025-26.</p> <p>Focus on improving customer pathways and community awareness to streamline adaptations and reduce delays; RBC waiting list decreased from 11 to 6 months during 2024-25.</p>
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Health of our Town and Village Centres

At its meeting on 29 January 2025 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 request approved by the Corporate Overview Group.

A recent retail review commissioned for each of the Boroughs 7 larger town and village centres had highlighted some of the challenges and opportunities and had set out recommendations identified in the review. The Group were also asked to consider the Council's Economic Growth Strategy and plan and UKSPF funding and the work being progressed.

The Group discussion covered:

- The UKSPF allocations for the Borough
- The need for an up-to-date retail review to provide a more realistic view of the Borough's town and villages and any economic changes
- Cabinets ambition for Public Realm improvements to Central Avenue in West Bridgford and the accessibility study that had been commissioned by Nottinghamshire County Council including public support for any change
- The Masterplan for West Bridgford and the wider area of Gamston and Tollerton
- The feasibility of exploring additional banking services due to recent bank closures
- Support for town and village centres and local businesses and how these are measured by way of proven success
- Social media support for businesses

The Group agreed to:	Progress Update – June 2025:
Review and comment on the data that had been provided on the Boroughs town and village centres	<p>The areas of focus for the Economic Growth Strategy in 2025/26 are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tourism

Considered and identified the priorities and initial actions from the Economic Growth Strategy and suggested actions to be prioritised	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • West Bridgford masterplan • Development of allocated commercial land • Business Support (UK Shared Prosperity funding) • Big Business Forum
Prioritise the closure of banks within the Boroughs town and village centres and to research opportunities for mobile banking and/or banking hubs	<p>Letters were sent to the LGA and DCN highlighting the Council's concerns around recent bank closures and the absence of banking services on the high street.</p> <p>The Economic Growth Team continue to try to make contact with banks and have recently had a meeting with Barclays.</p>

Management of Open Spaces on New Developments

At its meeting on 26 March 2025 the Director for Development and Economic Growth provided an overview of the Management of Open Spaces on New Developments, it's scrutiny objective and its progress since it was last discussed at a meeting of Growth and Development Scrutiny Group in January 2024. The Group were reminded of the Cabinet decision in May 2024 which affirmed the Council's position to not adopt open spaces, but to support a Good Practice Guide, support the work of the scrutiny group and continue lobbying Government.

The Group received a presentation from the Director for Development and Economic Development highlighting the Council's draft Good Practice Guide to encourage developers to provide good practice and had been designed to represent a reasonable, achievable commitment from developers and management companies in the interest of achieving the best quality service for residents.

The Leader of the Council also addressed the Group to advise members of a roundtable discussion he held in July 2024, which brought together cross-party Councillors, developers, management companies and residents to have conversations around the four Good Practice themes:

- Service
- Fairness
- Transparency
- Community

The Group discussion that followed covered:

- Need for further roundtable discussions to ensure developers and management companies were aware of the guidance and be prepared to sign up to it
- How would the guidance be made accessible including a list of developers who had signed up to it
- Adoption of open spaces and the possibility for a town or parish council to adopt the space if they wished to

- The decision for the Council not to adopt open spaces and how this was not unique to Rushcliffe and is an issue across the housing development sector
- The unfairness of the management company model and the financial burden for those residents living on new development.
- Maintenance of open spaces being far more complex with the introduction of SUD's, play parks and landscaping

The Group agreed to:	Progress Update – June 2025:
Endorse the Good Practice Guide for the Management of Open Spaces and for it to be forwarded to Cabinet for consideration	Changes have been made to the Good Practice Guide following feedback from the Scrutiny Committee and other stakeholders. A report is being taken to Cabinet in July to adopt the Guide.
The continuing to lobby Government to regulate the governance of management companies to ensure transparency and to remove charges unrelated to the management of open spaces	A response was received from Baroness Taylor, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Housing and Local Government and a further meeting is to be arranged with officials from the Freehold Estates Reform Team.
Examine the deployment of the document and continue to investigate any measurable outcomes and requested a second roundtable meeting at an appropriate time in the future and report any findings back to Growth and Development Scrutiny Group	The Guide will be shared after Cabinet in July, any future review and further meetings to be arranged.

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

Growth and Development Scrutiny are looking forward to a comprehensive programme of scrutiny topics in 2025/26 that will deliver economic growth and ensure sustainable, prosperous and thriving communities.