

## Growth and Development Scrutiny Group

### Chairman's Foreword

This annual report summarises the main work undertaken by this scrutiny group during 2025/26. This report will focus on the impact of that scrutiny. I am very pleased to note that the business of scrutiny has proceeded as planned and all topics programmed for 2025/26 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 Tina Combellack  
Chairman Growth and Development Scrutiny



Councillor Tina Combellack  
Chairman



Councillor Jason Billin  
Vice-Chair  
March 2026 - Present

## 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, considering 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:

- East Midlands Freeport.
- Asset Management Strategy.
- Shared Ownership and Other Affordable Housing.

## East Midlands Freeport

At its meeting, the Group received a presentation from Mr Cooper from the East Midlands Freeport (EMF), which provided an overview of the Freeport's purpose, governance, progress and challenges, including:

- **The role and structure of the Freeport**, explaining that EMF is a public-private partnership comprising Rushcliffe, North West Leicestershire and South Derbyshire District Councils, their respective County Councils and six private sector site owners or developers. It was confirmed that the Leader of Rushcliffe Borough Council represented the Council on the EMF Board and that EMF is a not-for-profit organisation.
- **The three Freeport sites**, being Ratcliffe on Soar Power Station, the East Midlands Airport Gateway Industrial Cluster, and the East Midlands Intermodal Park near the Toyota plant, with an ambition to develop low-carbon industrial sites to attract inward investment, support skills development and improve transport and connectivity.
- **Progress and incentives**, noting that EMF was established in March 2023, with financial incentives available until September 2031, that skills, sustainability and innovation strategies were in development, and that sites benefit from tax and customs incentives, although business interest to date had been relatively low.
- **Ratcliffe on Soar site updates**, highlighting its strategic infrastructure assets, Local Development Order granted in 2023, strong interest from the Office for Investment, and challenges relating to decommissioning timescales, grid connections and traffic impacts around Junction 24 of the M1, with transport modelling underway.

- **Investment and engagement**, reporting that around £150m of investment had been secured, approximately 850 jobs created, and that EMF was working with local communities and partners, with biodiversity net gain requirements applying across all sites.
- During discussion, Councillors raised concerns about **transport links, traffic impacts, leadership visibility, infrastructure constraints and the pace of progress**, particularly at Ratcliffe on Soar. The Group requested that its comments be **fed back to Cabinet** and suggested that wider **all-Councillor information sharing** be undertaken.

The Group agreed to:	Progress Update – June 2026:
Members of the Group discussed inviting a representative to return to a future Group meeting and it was agreed that this be reviewed following receipt of the timeline information	A further Freeport update, presented by a Freeport representative, will come to the Group for scrutiny in July 2026. This will focus on greater understanding of the Freeport and its governance structure, impact of the development locally and timescales
Members of the Group considered the update provided by EMF at the Committee meeting and would identify further opportunities to be explored or developed going forward	

### Asset Management Strategy Refresh

At its meeting, the Group considered the refreshed Asset Management Strategy and Plan, which had been brought forward due to workload pressures in the Corporate Governance Group. The Chair emphasised that scrutiny should focus on whether the Strategy provided an appropriate framework for effective economic management, with discussion centred on processes and approaches rather than detailed local issues.

The Director of Development and Economic Growth presented the refreshed Strategy and Plan, explaining that it replaces the 2020–2025 version and aligns with the Council's Corporate Strategy. The presentation highlighted that work had been undertaken across the authority to ensure the asset portfolio supports service delivery, economic growth and wider place-based outcomes, including town and village centre masterplanning. Achievements from the previous period were outlined, including disposal of surplus assets, carbon offset land acquisition, the successful delivery and operation of Rushcliffe Oaks Crematorium, and regeneration projects at Bingham and Cotgrave.

Key changes in the refreshed Strategy and Plan were highlighted, including:

- **Preparatory work relating to Local Government Reorganisation (LGR)**, focused on information sharing and readiness activity in response to guidance from MHCLG, while awaiting further Government decisions.

- **Updated governance arrangements**, including revised terms of reference for the Asset Investment Group to reflect a shift from revenue-only acquisitions to consideration of wider opportunities.
- A refreshed approach to **carbon management**, supporting the Council's commitment to be carbon neutral by 2030.

During discussion, members of the Group sought clarification on the relationship between the Strategy, Plan and the Action Plan. It was confirmed that Cabinet approval relates to the Strategy and Plan, while the Action Plan is a live document that evolves over time, Councillors' comments were welcomed to feed into this process. Officers also explained that delivery of the £4.8 million affordable housing capital allocation depends on commuted sums and the capacity of registered providers, with some uncertainties existing which affect timescales.

Councillors raised questions on individual assets and projects, including recent acquisitions and disposals, town centre and woodland projects, and the West Bridgford Vision Plan. Officers explained that the Vision Plan is being developed with external consultants, with stakeholder engagement underway and findings expected in spring 2026 to support future growth and funding opportunities. The woodland scheme at Upper Broughton was confirmed as primarily a carbon offsetting project, with additional environmental and biodiversity benefits.

The Group also discussed progress towards the Council's Net Zero target, community and non-commercial benefits arising from the asset portfolio, and the Council's role in supporting local health centre projects through Officer facilitation rather than direct funding. Members of the Group commented on the scale of the asset portfolio, highlighted the success of Rushcliffe Oaks Crematorium, and suggested that the Council could communicate the benefits of its asset activity more widely.

The Group agreed to:	Progress Update – June 2026:
The Growth and Development Scrutiny Group supported the Asset Management Strategy Refresh and gave its approval to Cabinet	Cabinet approved the refreshed Asset Management Strategy in March 2026

### Shared Ownership and Other Affordable Housing

At its meeting, the Group undertook detailed scrutiny of shared ownership and other affordable housing products to assess whether current approaches were delivering the best outcomes for residents and aligning with identified housing need.

- **Members of the Group considered evidence from the 2024 Housing Needs Assessment**, which identified a strong and ongoing requirement for affordable rented housing, and examined how this compared with recent delivery levels across different tenures.

- **The Group explored the Council’s role in securing affordable housing through** planning policy and Section 106 agreements, noting the Council’s limited influence over matters such as pricing, marketing, service charges and resale arrangements for home ownership products.
- **Members of the Group examined the reasons for disparities between identified need and actual delivery**, including the impact of historic planning permissions, site phasing, viability constraints and Registered Provider capacity.
- **The Group scrutinised the increasing use of shared ownership and other intermediate products**, recognising their role in supporting households unable to access market housing, while acknowledging that they serve a different cohort to those in greatest housing need.
- **Discussion considered the Council’s approach to negotiating tenure mix**, with officers confirming that affordable rented homes are prioritised wherever viable, reflecting acute demand and homelessness pressures.
- **Members of the Group reviewed the robustness of viability assessments**, including the use of open-book appraisals and independent validation, and noted that flexibility on tenure mix can be necessary to unlock stalled or marginal sites.
- **The Group considered accessibility standards, long-term affordability safeguards** and the risks of affordability being lost over time, noting that discounted market sale homes are secured in perpetuity and that affordable housing policies seek to maximise accessible provision.
- **Members of the Group discussed the governance and regulation of Registered Providers**, recognising the limits of Council control and the respective roles of the Housing Ombudsman and the Regulator of Social Housing.
- **The scrutiny concluded that while some mismatch between need and delivery is unavoidable**, the Council continues to apply policy consistently and seek full compliance unless justified by evidence, with Councillors satisfied that the scrutiny objectives had been met, subject to further follow-up information.

The Group agreed to:	Progress Update – June 2026:
Acknowledge the Council’s limited role in the allocation and management of affordable home ownership products and supported continued monitoring of Section 106 compliance and delivery through policy and partnerships	Following the March meeting, Officers provided further information to members of the group regarding role of Ward Members, a breakdown of figures for accessible and adaptable housing and a summary of the housing needs assessment

## **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 2026/27 that will deliver economic growth and ensure sustainable, prosperous and thriving communities.