

Growth and Development Scrutiny Group

Chairman's Foreword

This annual report summarises the main work undertaken by this scrutiny group during 2019/20. It has been a very challenging time over the past few months, with the outbreak of Covid-19 and subsequent lockdown. Local communities, businesses, and employment have all been affected in some way or another and the Council has had to adapt its services and resources to provide support where needed. 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.

We have explored the Council's Growth and Development in line with the Council's priorities which are:

- Delivering economic growth to ensure a sustainable, prosperous and thriving local economy;
- Maintaining and enhancing our residents' quality of life; and
- Transforming the Council to enable the delivery of efficient high quality services.

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 Abby Brennan, for the lively and probing discussions, and for their engagement and support.

Councillor Neil Clarke
Chairman Growth and Development Scrutiny



Cllr Neil Clarke
Chairman



Cllr A Brennan
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:

- Abbey Road Depot Redevelopment;
- Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL);
- Business Support Offer;
- Support and Promoting Economic Vibrancy in Town Centres;
- Management of Open Spaces; and
- Approach to Assisting Economic Recovery in the Borough.

Abbey Road Depot Redevelopment

This item of scrutiny covered the Council's ambition to relocate the depot to a more suitable site, bringing the land at Abbey Road forward for housing development. The Group were asked to consider recommendations made by Cabinet in October 2018 and a subsequent further Cabinet recommendation in July 2019, which provided the group with the Council's objectives, design code and progression of the housing development to date. The Executive Manager – Transformation delivered a presentation and provided the Group with a Masterplan, which included specific design standards and illustrative examples. These included:

- Minimum house sizes;
- Building for Life Standards;
- Off road parking and cycle storage;
- Roof top gardens;
- Level access;
- Central open space; and
- Non-standard house type, using different elevations styles and materials.

Planning permission was granted in June 2019. The site was marketed and 17 offers were received, nine that mostly met the criteria of the Design Code and Masterplan with the highest offers were shortlisted. The shortlisted developers were asked to prepare a second bid based on revised Design Codes to include a list of energy efficiencies. four developers who met the additional criteria were selected for interview and the preferred bidder referred to Cabinet for consideration.

In respect of the Design Code the Group were assured that legal advice would be sought to ensure that the contract protects the Council's interests and in addition the chosen developer will be asked to demonstrate they share the Council's aspirations.

The Group were excited to see the ambitious proposals within the Masterplan and Design Code and looked forward to meeting the appointed developer.

Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL)

The Group were provided with background information that supported the adoption of CIL. This explained how the levy is calculated, how it supports local infrastructure and the financial liability for the developer. The CIL has been developed alongside the preparation of Local Plan Part 2 and had also been considered by the Local Development Framework Group and subsequently approved by Council on 19 September 2019.

Examples and percentages on where collected CIL receipts would be spent were provided in a Draft Charging Schedule which suggested the Council would collect up to £13m over the period 2019-2028.

The Group welcomed the changes and were particularly pleased to see that the scheme would assist parishes where smaller developments seen across the Borough have not had to pay anything by way of Section 106 money. Funding from CIL would ensure that all developments would be contributing in future.

Business Support Offer

A presentation was delivered to the Group by the Service Manager for Transformation which focused on Business Support within Rushcliffe and highlighted the Council's priorities in respect of Growth and Development, including driving growth and regeneration, infrastructure, business support, employment and skills and proactively managing growth to ensure the Council creates great places to live and work.

The Group were reminded of the successful regeneration completed in Cotgrave, the delivery and completion of housing at Hollygate Park and improvements to the town centre to support the housing growth, including new shops and offices, a multi-service centre and public realm improvements. During the development, an employment partnership was established which included working with local schools, colleges and businesses to support the delivery of this work.

The Group were provided with information on the range of business support that the Council and its partners provide, these include;

- The D2N2 Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP), a partnership between local government and businesses to drive economic growth.
- The Growth Hub, established by the D2N2 LEP using European Regional Development Funding matched with local funding, the hub provides a range of support including funding, events and workshops.

- The Rushcliffe Business Partnership, a not for profit partnership funded by the Council through an annual service level agreement and also provides officer support in organising and promoting networking events and activities.

The group supported the delivery of the business support offer for businesses and employment across the Borough and suggested that the D2N2 Hub are invited to a future meeting of the Growth and Development Scrutiny Group to explain their approach for business support.

Support and Promoting Economic Vibrancy in Town Centres

The Group were presented with data relating to the health of high streets in the Borough and the support the Council is providing to ensure they continue to thrive. These include; five Growth Boards in, West Bridgford, Bingham, Radcliffe on Trent, East Leake and more recently Fairham; The Council's Shop Front Improvement Grant Scheme, a match funding facility available to all high street businesses across the Borough.

The Group were presented with the key findings from a 2016 Kerching retail review which revealed that town and village centres within the Borough are performing well despite the challenging environment facing UK high streets. It was reported that all town centres in Rushcliffe had a high street retailer, for example Co-op, Boots, all have parking provision, all centres were delivering some form of events, mainly seasonal for example summer fairs or Christmas light switch on and all areas have social media presence.

The Group noted the report provided and welcomed the Council's initiatives, and support and the successful vibrancy of Rushcliffe communities whilst highlighting the need to monitor trends and ensure continued success.

Management of Open Spaces

At its meeting on 30 July 2020, the Executive Manager – Communities provided the Group with a brief history that explained how housing and housing estates have developed over the years, from the 1900's, where plots were large with generous gardens and street layout was linear, and there was often a municipal park in close proximity, through to the present time where developments have moved further out of towns, plots are much smaller as densities increase. The Group were advised that, pre 2000 Rushcliffe adopted all open spaces with no extra funding for maintenance. The period 2000-2010 commuted sums were introduced to address the pressures on Council budgets, however, in some instances developers failed to provide the commuted sum or transferred the land to the Council resulting in issues of open spaces not being managed or maintained. Since 2011, the Borough sought to address this issue and no longer adopts, maintains or inspects any open space on new housing developments. The current position is that housing developers are responsible for payments towards the maintenance of open spaces on Strategic Sites. The developers then pass the cost and responsibility on to residents through a management company as a monthly/annual charge, which is then payable for the entire time that the property on the development is occupied. The Executive Manager – Communities explained that on the Boroughs Strategic Allocations, most include

large scale community areas to mitigate the harm of the development and provided examples at Bingham, Cotgrave, Gamston and Newton. The Group were advised of the potential issues with this approach in the long term as the developments age.

Alarmed by some of the issues and the challenges that the Council may face in the future, members requested that Officers research in more depth the operational functions of Management Companies employed to manage and maintain open spaces on large housing developments, and in addition, Councillors were asked to identify examples of open space agreements within their wards. It was agreed that the topic be brought back to a later date of the Development Scrutiny Group.

Approach to assisting Economic Recovery in the Borough Post Covid-19

At the Meeting on 30 July 2020, the Service Manager – Transformation delivered a presentation on the Council's Wider Approach to Assisting Economic Recovery from Covid-19 and the Council's and Partners plans to mitigate its impact on the local economy. The D2N2 Growth Hub carried out a survey asking businesses how they had been effected by Covid-19. The survey revealed that those businesses reporting the worst impact tended to be new and smaller businesses who operate in a business to consumer environment, typically hospitality, arts and entertainment, recreation and leisure, wholesale and retail. The Group noted from statistics provided, the retail sector footfall had fallen and people were nervous about shopping and were less willing to go to a city and therefore local town centres may benefit from the change in shopping habits.

The Service Manager – Transformation provided the Group with an update and information in respect of support the Council and its Partners had provided to businesses as the easing of lockdown continues. These included the grant finding portal on the website, support with reopening our local markets at Bingham and West Bridgford and resources on the website including signage and Covid-19 secure guidance. The Economic Growth Team and Environmental Health Officers have followed up additional enquiries for support with calls and visits to businesses.

The Group noted that the Borough had been allocated £106,208 from the Reopening High Streets Safely funding, which is to be used in developing an action plan to safely reopen local economies, communications and public information and temporary public realm changes.

The Group highlighted their concerns in respect of youth unemployment and in particular, where young people are over presented in the sectors of work that have been forced to close during Covid-10 and the impact of reduction in and closure of the furlough scheme. The Service Manager – Transformation, advised the Group that the Nottinghamshire Local Resilience Forum, with representatives from Nottinghamshire County Council, District Councils, DWP and the D2N2 LEP were supporting the initial priorities of which unemployment is one. Adding that the Borough Council had recently restarted the employment and skills Group and Positive Futures/YouNG, starting with some summer programmes aimed at young people.

Council Officers were commended on how quickly staff had adapted to keep the Council's essential services and operations going and keeping businesses informed

and supported during the pandemic. The Group noted the report and that the Economic Growth Team would continue to review data, and listen to businesses and respond as required.

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 2019/20 all members of Growth and Development Scrutiny are looking forward to comprehensive programme of scrutiny topics that will deliver economic growth and ensure sustainable, prosperous and thriving communities.