

LOCAL GROWTH SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Local Growth Scrutiny Committee of the Bolsover District Council held in the Council Chamber, The Arc, Clowne on Tuesday, 1st August 2023 at 10:00 hours.

PRESENT:-

Members:-

Councillor Tom Kirkham in the Chair

Councillors Phil Smith (Vice-Chair) and Will Fletcher.

Officers:- Karen Hanson (Chief Executive), Jim Fieldsend (Monitoring Officer), Ian Barber (Director of Property and Construction, Dragonfly Development Limited), Chris Fridlington (Director of Economic Development, Dragonfly Development Limited), Natalie Etches (Business Growth Manager, Dragonfly Management (Bolsover) Ltd.), Caroline Daghsh (Senior Economic Development Officer – Growth and Investment, Dragonfly Management (Bolsover) Ltd.), and Joanne Wilson (Scrutiny & Elections Officer).

Also in attendance was Councillor John Ritchie, Portfolio Holder for Growth and Councillor David Bennett (observing).

LOC9-21/22 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillors Duncan Haywood, Mark Hinman and Janet Tait.

LOC10-21/22 URGENT ITEMS OF BUSINESS

There were no urgent items of business to consider.

LOC11-21/22 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made.

LOC12-21/22 MINUTES

Moved by Councillor Will Fletcher and seconded by Councillor Phil Smith

RESOLVED that the Minutes of a Local Growth Scrutiny Committee held on 27th June 2023 be approved as a correct record.

LOC13-21/22 LIST OF KEY DECISIONS AND ITEMS TO BE CONSIDERED IN PRIVATE

There were no items on the List of Key Decisions and items to be considered in private to note.

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LOC14-21/22 UPDATE ON THE DRAFT BOLSOVER DISTRICT AREA TOURISM STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN 2023-2025

Committee considered a detailed report in relation to the updated draft Bolsover District Area Tourism Strategy and action plan.

The Business Growth Manager explained that the Strategy and action plan had been updated to reflect the sector post-covid and now had 5 priorities which local stakeholders had been consulted on. It set out the main objectives, local context and evaluated achievements under the old strategy, and supported the Council's priority of 'Promote the District and work with partners to increase tourism.'

The action plan set out clear short, medium, and long-term actions for delivery – the short and medium term actions would be delivered across 2023-24 as soon as possible, with the remaining action prior to the end of the strategy in 2025. Monitoring reports would contain a Red, Amber, and Green status so Members could easily identify progress against the action plan.

Moved by Councillor Tom Kirkham and seconded by Councillor Will Fletcher

RESOLVED that the draft Bolsover District Area Tourism Strategy and action plan be submitted to Executive for approval.

LOC15-21/22 BUSINESS ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY (BES) AND ACTION PLAN

Committee considered a detailed report in relation to a revised draft Business Engagement Strategy (BES) and action plan following on from an earlier report in March 2023.

The service had secured funding from the LGA of £12,000 which had enabled consultancy support via the Economic Advisors Programme. The consultancy support had proved invaluable in the Council's approach and checking the deliverability of the strategy and action plan.

The BES identified three main areas of focus:

- Insight
- Connecting with Businesses
- Communications

The service aimed to use a range of methods to engage businesses to accommodate the variety of businesses within the area, approximately 3000 at present. This included a number of start-up businesses, those operating as 'work from home' and those with no location i.e. driving instructors.

A key objective in the action plan was the creation of an account management approach for businesses. This would be enabled by the CRM system recently introduced by the service, which would enable improved communications and efficient data management.

Members were also presented with the first draft of the new InBusiness magazine which aimed to publicise support and showcase local businesses.

It was noted that the target dates presented in the action plan referred to 2022, which

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was outside the time frame of the plan, and an amended version would be issued to Members.

In response to a Member's query, it was explained that the system would enable officers to track inward investment, circulate news shots, store basic details about each business, log enquiries for support/funding, and note businesses interest in grants, development, and networking. It would also enable the service to carry out targeted engagement with local businesses.

A Member queried how the initiative linked to the work of the LEP on business engagement. The officer noted that the service regularly attended LEP meetings to ensure the Council remained on board with LEP programmes. However, a number of funding streams were due to end so a localised approach would now be of benefit to the District. As an additional boost, Clowne Enterprises would be operating at a local level and would be able to signpost businesses to support and grants.

Moved by Councillor Phil Smith and seconded by Councillor Will Fletcher

RESOLVED that:

- (1) the revised draft Business Engagement Strategy and action plan be submitted to Executive for formal adoption;
- (2) Scrutiny supports a report to a future Council meeting seeking additional revenue budget to be able to deliver the activities as set out in the strategy action plan.

LOC16-21/22 UK SHARED PROSPERITY FUND - MONITORING UPDATE

Committee considered a report which provided Members with an update on the delivery of the UKSPF programmes.

The report and appendix detailed expenditure and activity so far. Across the five projects, the service had just over £789k for the period of the funding. Following delays in receipt of the allocation from Government, the start of the projects had been impacted but it was expected that all five projects would be delivered as planned over the two-and-a-half-year period.

Tourism and Culture

Accessibility audits were being completed across all four main centres to ensure that visitors were able to fully assess access to visitor sites, restaurants, bars/pubs, and signage with the aim of increasing inward and outward tourism. A total of 30 accessibility audits were being completed via Accessibility UK and visitors would be able to search the site for Bolsover locations and businesses as part of planning their visit.

Business Growth Grants Scheme

The project offered two grant options. The first was grant funding available to existing businesses to encourage business improvement and growth opportunities resulting in job creation and retention. The growth grant was up to a maximum of £10,000 and had an 80% grant intervention rate.

The second grant was a small start-up grant of £500 at a 100% intervention rate.

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Applicants could be pre-start or a new business (up to 18 months old) and would be able to work with a business adviser on a 1:1 basis to assist with completion of the application and business plan but also to offer on-going support and access to workshops, networking events and courses.

A number of applications were due to go to the next panel meeting for consideration.

Net Zero Hyper Local Innovation Programme

This project aimed to deliver green skills audits for local businesses. In addition, local businesses would be supported to access training and funding to develop their understanding and skills relating to Net Zero. An additional element would include the completion of a feasibility study for a future green skills centre in the District based on the needs of business and informed by this programme of business engagement.

Hyper Local Small Business Support Scheme

Clowne Enterprise, an established local business support organisation had been commissioned to deliver this project. The support scheme covered pre-start, newly established and existing businesses within Bolsover district. Residents could take advantage of assistance to access mentoring and financial support to help launch a new business. Pre-start, start-up and existing businesses could receive assistance to develop a new product, become investor ready, or improve productivity of their business through innovation and technology implementation. Up to 30th June 2023, 15 people had received 1:1 coaching, and 13 businesses had received 1:1 coaching.

Visitor Economy Business Support

The project would contribute to accessibility, international tourism, and sector specific support for the cultural, historic and heritage sector. Businesses were being offered a programme of support, embracing innovative ways of working and business adaptations. Industry experts had been procured to deliver sector specific support including Search Engine Optimisation (SEO), social media, online booking channels, working with travel trade, accessibility, green and sustainable tourism and working with international tourism operators and events development. Wider environmental considerations would include the development of 'shoulder' season experiences and encouraging day visitors to stay longer and 'stay with us.' This would also assist in increasing productivity through the offer of year-round opportunities and build further business resilience.

An additional part to the new post was the development of 'Bolsover the Place' and creating a pride of place, both through tourism businesses, accommodation providers and attractions but also pride in the wider community and businesses as a whole.

In response to a Member's query regarding the process should the accessibility audit identify work that needed to take place to improve a premise, for example, a hearing loop or ramps, the officer noted that the Tourism and Place Manager was working with businesses to identify possible grant funding. Anything identified within main public realm areas or wider issues around town trails was being dealt with as part of wider work on the town centre.

A Member queried how the green skills audits planned differed from the wider skills audit recently completed. The Director of Economic Development noted that the green skills audit work would build on previous projects with colleagues at Sheffield Hallam (general skills audits and pathways post 16) and Nottingham Trent (green skills). A key outcome was to assess future job requirements, potential locations within the District and potential

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skills gaps within the area. As part of the scheme there would be focused interviews with businesses within the sector which would then shape the creation of a Skills Hub.

A Member queried if this would link back to recent work looking at the potential to develop skills provision/hub at the Pleasley Vale site. The Director confirmed it did.

A Member commented that the report was very comprehensive and welcomed the detailed update. They also queried what scope there would be for business-to-business support within the five project themes. The officer confirmed that it was not included within the five projects, however, there were a range of networking events and opportunities for local businesses that were developing well, and this enabled business to business engagement. The Director noted that the service had developed an active programme of networking events during and following the pandemic. The recent one had been branded as a 'Business detox' event involving lots of business-to-business interactions and sharing of information and ideas, with around 20 attendees per event. There was also a specific Business Women in Bolsover Network, so lots of peer to peer networking opportunities available.

A Member noted that technically the UKSPF programme was already around halfway through, and he questioned if the Council was still able to deliver everything planned due to the allocation delays and if there was a risk of non-delivery. The officer clarified that while the Council was still in the procurement phase for the Net Zero skills survey, all other areas were moving forward. The service was making allocations to local businesses and was already looking at where there could be underspend from other areas as demand was rising for Net Zero based support, beyond what had been originally allocated. The Director also noted that the projects were not yet halfway in terms of the funding profile, the biggest amount of spend was expected in year 3 of the programme and he expected the Council to spend what had been allocated.

A Member asked if it were possible to geographically plot the businesses in receipt of grant support and those engaging so the gaps in engagement and distribution of funding could be easily identified. The Senior Economic Development Officer noted this could be done and current analysis showed that engagement was from all over the District and events were actively being run in a range of locations to ensure the networking opportunities were accessible. There had been a good geographical spread to the applications received to date and businesses had given Clowne Enterprise good feedback about the Council's approach and the support and funding available.

Moved by Councillor Will Fletcher and seconded by Councillor Phil Smith

RESOLVED that the progress report be noted.

LOC17-21/22 DRAGONFLY DEVELOPMENT LIMITED (DDL) DELIVERY UPDATE

Committee considered a report which provided an update on completed schemes, schemes currently being delivered and pipeline sites.

The completed schemes showed both evidence of delivery and income to the Council. DDL had projects scheduled for delivery across the next two years and were also supporting a neighbouring authority that had been affected by the collapse of Robert Woodhead Ltd. (RWL).

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A Member queried the Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO) in relation to the Rood Lane site. The officer explained there was a small plot of land outside of the curtilage of the main site which was required as part of the scheme – a number of enquiries had been made and officers were now looking to finalise a CPO for the plot.

A Member noted that DDL was aiming to complete work for other authorities, and he queried the expected duration of the schemes and whether there was sufficient capacity to deliver for other organisations on top of delivery for the Council. The officer noted that the current scheme being delivered was due to complete in early 2024. Delivery of Bolsover Homes sites remained the number one priority but there was capacity for the company to deliver other schemes elsewhere. While DDL was not actively seeking additional work, there was scope to deliver more.

A Member queried the time frame being attributed to the current pipeline sites identified in the report. The officer noted that it was difficult to define a clear rigid time frame as currently the company had found the need to be flexible and alter scheduled works where an urgent scheme was identified. For example, the company had initially dealt with sites in progress affected by the RWL collapse. DDL management were open to look at opportunities as they arose and adjust the planned work programme if there was a clear benefit in completing other projects. An example of this was the development of the new crematorium in Shirebrook which was now being taken on by DDL.

A Member queried an open-book methodology, opposed to a closed-book methodology. Officers confirmed that normally companies delivering projects such as this would operate under a closed-book system whereby the contractor set the cost for a project and where they delivered for less than anticipated, make more profit, or conversely where the total cost was more than expected, they could incur a loss, if additional charges could not be passed on to the client.

Open-book was where the contractual parties were totally open about the project procurement and worked together to deliver what the client wanted. Where this happened, there was more likelihood of a project being delivered on time and on budget. In this case the contractor was open about the profit margin. To reduce risk to the Council, and as DDL was a young company, it had been agreed that open book was the preferred methodology to use.

A Member queried if future reports could include cost details or associated risks registers. The officer noted that some of the cost information may be commercially sensitive and would not be included in a public report, however, detail on risks could be.

In response to a Member's query, the Chief Executive advised that the Shareholder Board was now set up and could report on the Terms of Reference, remit, and ongoing work programme to a future Scrutiny meeting.

In response to a Member's query regarding membership of the Shareholder Board, the Chief Executive Officer confirmed these were the three statutory officers of the Council, the Portfolio Holders for Housing, Growth, and Corporate Performance and Governance and the programme manager/support officer.

In response to the Member's query regarding a scrutiny Member or opposition member to be part of the Shareholder Board, the Monitoring Officer clarified that the Shareholder Board was not a decision-making group and would report to the Executive. However,

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reports from the Shareholder Board would be taken to Scrutiny.

Moved by Councillor Tom Kirkham and Councillor Will Fletcher
RESOLVED that the update be noted.

LOC18-21/22 REVIEW OF TOWN CENTRE REGENERATION FRAMEWORKS - ADDITIONAL BRIEFING

Committee considered a verbal report from the Director of Economic Development, Dragonfly Development Ltd., on the completion of the Review of Town Centre Regeneration Frameworks.

Members would be aware that a review of the Regeneration Frameworks was part of the Scrutiny Committee's work programme prior to the local elections. This work included a thorough review of each of the four Frameworks and resulted in a number of suggestions for taking work forward in each of the four areas covered by the individual Frameworks. However, not all of these suggestions could be translated into actionable recommendations and as they were focused on discreet actions in individual places; they did not provide a strategic framework to take forward a consistent and a District-wide approach to regeneration over the next four years. Therefore, officers proposed bringing a further report back to the Scrutiny Committee to pull together and summarise the key findings from the previous work on the Regeneration Frameworks to allow Members to work through the issues and options to inform a wider response to the challenges and opportunities highlighted by this work. It was considered this approach would also help Members to add value to their next piece of work because a further strategic review of the Regeneration Frameworks would result in recommendations that would flow directly into further meaningful scrutiny of levelling up across the District.

RESOLVED that the officer update be noted.

LOC19-21/22 LOCAL GROWTH SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME 2023/24

Committee considered their proposed work programme for 2023/24. The Scrutiny & Elections Officer noted that the reports for October would be amended to incorporate the additional session on the Review of Town Centre Regeneration Frameworks.

Members reviewed the draft scope for the 2023/24 review agreed at the June meeting. Members would need to agree the title of the review once work commenced in October.

Moved by Councillor Will Fletcher and seconded by Councillor Tom Kirkham
RESOLVED that:

- (1) the Work Programme 2023/24 be noted;
- (2) the draft review scope be approved.

(Scrutiny & Elections Officer)

The formal part of the meeting concluded at 10:54 hours and Members then met as a working party to discuss potential review work. The working party concluded at 11:12 hours.