

LOCAL GROWTH SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Local Growth Scrutiny Committee of the Bolsover District Council held in Committee Room 1, The Arc, Clowne on Monday, 29th April 2024 at 10:00 hours.

PRESENT:-

Members:-

Councillor Tom Kirkham in the Chair

Councillors Will Fletcher, Duncan Haywood, Jeanne Raspin and Jane Yates.

Officers:- Steve Brunt (Strategic Director of Services), Jim Fieldsend (Director of Governance and Legal Services & Monitoring Officer), Chris Fridlington (Director for Economic Development (Devolution)), Ian Barber (Director of Property and Construction, Dragonfly Development Ltd.), Natalie Etches (Business Growth Manager, Dragonfly Development Ltd.), Amy Bryan (Governance and Civic Manager) and Matthew Kerry (Governance and Civic Officer).

Also in attendance at the meeting was Councillor John Ritchie, Portfolio Holder for Growth, and Councillor Phil Smith, Junior Portfolio Holder for Growth.

LOC50-21/22 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absences received.

LOC51-21/22 URGENT ITEMS OF BUSINESS

There were no urgent items of business to consider.

LOC52-21/22 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Tom Kirkham declared that he was a member of the Pleasley Park and Vale Conservation Area Joint Working Group.

LOC53-21/22 MINUTES

Moved by Councillor Jane Yates and seconded by Councillor Jeanne Raspin
RESOLVED that the Minutes of a Local Growth Scrutiny Committee held on 12th February 2024 be approved as a true and correct record.

LOC54-21/22 LIST OF KEY DECISIONS AND ITEMS TO BE CONSIDERED IN PRIVATE

RESOLVED that the List of Key Decisions and Items to be considered in the private document be noted.

LOCAL GROWTH SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

LOC55-21/22 REGENERATION UPDATE - VERBAL REPORT

The Business Growth Manager provided a verbal report on the Regeneration Update; it was important for the Committee to scrutinise the work, though there was currently little to report.

Talks with the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Levelling Up Jacob Young MP, the Department for Levelling Up itself and Mark Fletcher MP for Bolsover were ongoing, though the plans were not yet ready for public consumption due to unconfirmed details. For transparency, the intent to publish the plans was present, but this was not yet possible.

A Member asked, as the previous unsuccessful attempt prior to this new allocation of funding was due to no shovel-ready proposals being in place, what was the Council doing to mitigate this so when funding was allocated, proposals could be submitted and prove successful. The Business Growth Manager answered that part of the update on the Business Growth Strategy, to be considered later in the meeting was looking at exactly that. Proposals under the Levelling Up Round 2 bid were deliverable compared to the Regeneration Fund, as the Fund had a timescale of only two years, which had implications on what the Council could deliver; it was not about being shovel-ready, it was the completion of these projects within the limited timescale.

The Chair noted that when looking at the Levelling-Up bid the intent had been to share with Parish Councils and that a previous regeneration project involving a Community Centre had never been completed. The Chair asked for confirmation regarding the criteria that would be used for inclusion in future bids. The Business Growth Manager explained that this was not Levelling-Up funding, this funding had been granted, but that the Council would have to consider all the criteria (for example was there a business case, how deliverable the project was, the value for money, etc.) so a longlist of projects would be reduced, and a subsequent shortlist submitted as part of the first draft of proposals. The Chair asked if the Committee would be able to see and scrutinise this list; the Business Growth Manager stated they would follow this up with the Chief Executive.

LOC56-21/22 EAST MIDLANDS INVESTMENT ZONE

The Committee considered a report that provided an update on the proposals for the East Midlands Investment Zone (EMIZ), the emerging investment plan and next steps, including the Council's role in the EMIZ and to note the decision taken by Executive on 15th April 2024.

The Director for Economic Development (Devolution) explained that the EMIZ covered Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire – it covered the same area as D2N2 and the East Midlands Mayoral Combined County Authority (EMMCCA) – and would provide extra funding and investment. With the District well placed along the county line, proposals could prove successful.

The Investment Zone would be managed by the EMMCCA and shovel-ready projects would be favoured; the inaugural Development Board was ready to put forward proposals and complete recommendations with the intent to get a head start, with the first meeting of the board taking place the day after the Committee.

LOCAL GROWTH SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

After a question from the Chair, the Director for Economic Development (Devolution) explained the new Mayor would take up their responsibilities on the 7th May 2024 and the EMMCCA would become the governing body for the Investment Zone; the Council's work would be adjacent to them – the Development Board would submit proposals to the EMMCCA.

Moved by Councillor Will Fletcher and seconded by Councillor Jane Yates
RESOLVED that the report be noted.

LOC57-21/22 UPDATE ON TOURISM STRATEGY

The Committee considered a report which provided an update on the work developing a Tourism Strategy and understanding the opportunity for alignment with wider opportunities to unlock the growth potential of the area.

The Business Growth Manager explained there were five priority areas of the draft Tourism Strategy having worked in partnership with local stakeholders in the sector through workshops and direct consultations. These were:

1. Create a sense of place and grow Bolsover's economy;
2. Build business resilience through collaboration and skill;
3. Develop the District as a family friendly destination;
4. Create a stronger events offer;
5. Develop a strong marketing proposition for the District.

The Council had created a new role to replace the previous Tourism Officer role with a Tourism and Place Manager. The new role had a wider area of responsibility to develop the tourism sector alongside a wider 'Place' agenda.

The Business Growth Manager explained 'Place' was increasingly important to the strategy as providing an attractive area would enable the District to thrive as a desirable tourist destination. To ensure it was, Thinkingplace had been contracted to develop a new positive place narrative and reposition the area through this narrative and a place leadership programme. The narrative would be supported through a brand, visuals, and storyboard and would be promoted through a new website and social media platforms.

An example of this narrative was 'quick wins' for Bolsover Town by looking at a holistic place led approach. The identified quick wins aligned to the role that tourism, place and arts/culture all had in unlocking the growth potential of the town.

Consultations had taken place with local stakeholders and the Council had a working group of officers leading efforts across a range of Council's services.

In answer to a question the Business Growth Manager explained it was hoped a draft strategy would be ready later in 2024.

After a Member's question on the locations of the work being undertaken, the Business Growth Manager explained Bolsover Town was the main leisure/tourism area, though the whole District, including areas like Creswell Crags and Clowne Greenway, contributed to the strategy.

LOCAL GROWTH SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

The Chair asked how the strategy and investment was being funded. The Business Growth Manager answered the strategy would be completed by the Council and funding for specific projects would be applied for where available.

The Portfolio Holder for Growth added that the Council had a voice on the Local Visitor Economic Partnership, with local visitor attractions promoted.

Moved by Councillor Jeanne Raspin and seconded by Councillor Will Fletcher
RESOLVED that the report be noted.

LOC58-21/22 BUSINESS ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY - VERBAL REPORT

The Business Growth Manager explained that significant changes in the department had enabled the securement of a two-year contract for a Marketing Executive who would work with businesses, and the strategy would be undergoing a refresh to reflect the new Customer Relationship Management system and the Council's ability to interact and engage with stakeholders about how meaningful continued partnerships could be. As a result, momentum was starting to build and actions in the draft Engagement Strategy had moved on significantly.

The Chair noted businesses in their Ward had experienced positive relations with the Business Engagement Team; it was important, when extra funding and investment was available, for the Council to contact these businesses who would likely prove to be beneficiaries of such schemes as quickly as possible. The Business Growth Manager added that the Council was very good at talking to businesses when funding and investment was available, but if these businesses engaged with the Council more on the resources and opportunities available to them outside of these extra funding schemes, it would prove mutually beneficial, including on matters of reaching Net Zero.

On a question of reaching out to businesses and advertising what schemes, funding and investment were available, the Business Growth Manager explained these public promotions, such as InTouch magazine, were already taking place, as was direct correspondence to businesses; the key was getting the communication channels correct and keeping them open.

RESOLVED that the verbal report be noted.

LOC59-21/22 UPDATE ON BUSINESS GROWTH STRATEGY

The Committee considered a report which provided an update on the work to revise the Business Growth Strategy and Action Plan to reflect the new four year period 2024-2028.

The Business Growth Manager explained the Council's Business Growth Strategy for the period 2020-2024 had focussed on how the Development Directorate had prioritised its own work and its work with internal and external partners to achieve the Council's ambitions over the four-year period 2019-2023. This report was to update the Committee on the work so far completed in revising the strategy and action plan to reflect the new 4-year period 2024-2028.

LOCAL GROWTH SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

To maintain focus on achieving the Council's ambition the strategy was organised around the Council's economic priorities:

1. Making the best use of our assets;
2. Ensuring financial sustainability and increasing revenue streams;
3. Unlocking Development Potential: unlocking the capacity of major employment sites;
4. Enabling Housing Growth: increasing the supply, quality and range of housing to meet the needs of the growing population and support economic growth;
5. Working with partners to support enterprise, innovation, jobs and skills; and,
6. Promoting the District and working with partners to increase tourism.

The action plan included specific details of how these priorities would be achieved through various ongoing projects.

The Council had launched in April 2024 the new Corporate Plan 'Bolsover District – The Future 2024-2028', and the EMMCCA would likely see further changes be implemented to the strategy, including on matters of transport, housing and skills.

The five thematic areas of the strategy had been established with an ambition under each:

- Business and Innovation Ambition: we will make Bolsover an even better place to do business;
- Land and Housing Ambition: we will make Bolsover an even better place to live;
- Net Zero Ambition: we will take effective climate action for people and places;
- Transport Ambition: we will make it easier for anyone to get around the District and easier to get to and from other places; and,
- Adult Education and Skills Ambition: everybody is able to believe in a positive future, be more ambitious about what is possible and go on to have successful lives regardless of their background or situation.

Work was underway to build upon the above ambitions, as was work with internal and external partners to identify and set out the activities and initiatives which would help to achieve these ambitions.

The strategy would include an action plan and establish timelines.

A Member asked about the timescale of this strategy, and the Business Growth Manager stated the intention was for an update on the draft strategy be available at the next Committee meeting or the one thereafter; it was important the priorities and ambitions reflected corporately with what the Council wanted to achieve.

A Member noted the EMMCCA was a considerable new element for the Council to consider in its strategy. The Business Growth Manager added it was important the strategy reflected the significant changes taking place; the way the previous strategy had been written enabled the Council to respond quickly – the intent was to retain this ability to react quickly to any new funding and investment.

The Chair asked if the Committee would be able to provide its thoughts on the objectives of the strategy. The Business Growth Manager confirmed the draft would need to come before the Committee for consultation, which would provide an opportunity to comment.

LOCAL GROWTH SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Moved by Councillor Jeanne Raspin and seconded by Councillor Jane Yates
RESOLVED that the report be noted.

LOC60-21/22 UPDATE ON PLEASLEY VALE REGENERATION PROJECT

The Committee considered a report that provided an update regarding the Pleasley Vale regeneration project, activities which had been carried out around the site, and informed the Committee on future work and projects for Pleasley Vale Business Park.

A Project Officer had been employed in November 2022 to manage the regeneration project; with an allocated budget to commission reports and surveys to overcome site constraints and inform the principle of development. The objectives of the Project were initially to assess the viability and appropriateness of a range of regeneration options.

The main issue with the site was flooding; a significant area of the site was within a flood zone 3b (a functional flood plain). As a result, funding opportunities and interest for the Mill buildings were limited, but the importance of the natural environment on sites such as Pleasley Vale was present and there was interest to fund projects which sought to improve biodiversity, water management, and connect the visiting public with nature and history.

However, there remained the flooding concerns. Beaumont Rivers was an environmental restoration company which specialised in nature recovery and water management techniques; the Council had appointed them to oversee a flood mitigation and water management project to mitigate flooding in the future and enable the securement of future funding for the site (planning permission could not be granted until the issue of flooding was resolved).

Derbyshire Wildlife Trust had also been appointed to produce a Nature Recovery / Blue and Green Infrastructure Masterplan for Pleasley Vale. This was to survey and assess the current condition of the site, identify constraints and opportunities for funding, and collaborate with communities and education providers.

The Business Growth Manager also updated the Committee on the Property Services Team who were currently identifying all priority repairs for the Mill buildings and the total cost of repairs. A report would be taken to Executive once the detail and costs were known. Options for improvements would include roof repairs/replacements, new/repared windows, secondary glazing, and stone (including lintel and sill) repairs.

There could be no piecemeal approach to the site; a full comprehensive plan was required with a Health and Safety and operational perspective provided.

The Business Growth Manager responded to a question regarding insurance costs, stating that the Council had an insurance excess to pay, but the flood waters were still too high to carry out a full inspection of the damage; once the waters had receded a survey could be completed. For the tenants who had lost possessions, their own insurance policies would cover their losses; the Council was a Landlord and only covered the premises.

Moved by Councillor Jane Yates and seconded by Councillor Jeanne Raspin
RESOLVED that the report be noted.

LOCAL GROWTH SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

LOC61-21/22 UK SHARED PROSPERITY FUND - MONITORING UPDATE

The Business Growth Manager presented a report to the Committee to provide members with an update on the projects being delivered by the Economic Development Team with funding from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF).

The Council had received an allocation of £1,963,993 covering October 2022 – March 2025, of which £789,212 was allocated to five projects which were being delivered by the Economic Development Team. Listed on the document was a breakdown of the allocation of funding for each project followed by an update of activity and expenditure, which had taken place in the 12-month delivery period up to 31st March 2024. These five projects were as follows:

- Tourism and Culture;
- Business Growth Grants Scheme;
- Net Zero Hyper Local Innovation programme;
- Small Business Support Scheme; and,
- Visitor Economy Business Support.

The Business Growth Grants Scheme had proved incredibly successful with 40 Grants awarded up to the end of March 2024.

The Chair asked if it was possible to know the sectors that had not been successful in their bids for funding. The Business Growth Manager explained this was confidential data unless those businesses were happy to share this information as part of a case study exercise, though stripped back and anonymised sector-by-sector data could be provided to the Committee.

Moved by Councillor Will Fletcher and seconded by Councillor Duncan Haywood
RESOLVED that the report be noted.

LOC62-21/22 DRAGONFLY DEVELOPMENT LTD. MONTHLY SCRUTINY REPORT

The Director of Property and Construction – Dragonfly Development Ltd. presented the report to the Committee.

A Member asked if the changing of the materials at the Roseland Crematorium had changed the timeline of completion, and the Director of Property and Construction – Dragonfly stated there had been no material issues and other factors had affected the completion date.

The Chair noted there were three projects that were live, with the Woburn and Pendean project being held up by the possible Blackwell Community Centre. The Community Centre had already been costed, but the Parish Council had chosen to not fund it themselves due to financial uncertainty and asked if this was resulting in cost increases for the Council. The Director of Property and Construction – Dragonfly explained the final cost would not be known until completion but if the delay continued the site would take longer to complete and there would be a cost to having a site team present throughout.

LOCAL GROWTH SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

The Chair of the Committee asked questions regarding where responsibility lay for the final decision regarding the Community Centre in Blackwell and raised concerns about the project being delayed to retain the community centre as part of the project. The Monitoring Officer confirmed that the decision regarding the scheme in Blackwell was for Executive to take.

The Portfolio Holder for Growth explained the success of the project did not depend on the Community Centre being realised. The Chair asserted it was having a negative impact on the project and needed resolving for the good of the taxpayer, and the Portfolio Holder for Growth agreed it was having a negative impact, but stated the Council was doing all it could to manage this; several meetings in the previous week of the Committee had taken place, though in the end it was not in the hands of the Council to resolve, only to manage.

The Chair raised questions regarding any conflicts of interests with the scheme. The Monitoring Officer explained that where any decision of the Executive had an impact on Dragonfly Development Ltd. or its management, any member of the Executive with an interest, by virtue of their directorship of Dragonfly Development Ltd., would need to declare that interest.

A Member asked how projects were chosen and by who. The Chair stated it went through Council and the Director of Property and Construction – Dragonfly added a pre-existing list of potential sites would be brought forward by demand; if there was a need for a certain type/number of properties in one area, this was what drove certain projects. The Member followed up by asking how sites got on this list, and the Director of Property and Construction – Dragonfly answered that Dragonfly Development Ltd. was building on land the Council already owned, but the Council did not own geographically favourable sites for building upon (e.g., large, open, flat fields). Small sites already consisting of garages and/or spare land was typically patched together to create suitable sites for building.

In answer to a question regarding the Roseland Crematorium, in particular about the contract sum being £450,000 over the original quotation issued, the Business Growth Manager gave an overview of the costs involved for the Council and for Dragonfly as the contractor. With market and inflationary pressures taking place, it was the responsibility of Dragonfly Management (Bolsover) Ltd. to reduce costs attached to the project. This added cost covered the increase in risk, the contingencies, and general costs associated with the project. Through value engineering, though, could the risk be reduced along with the overall cost.

Moved by Councillor Duncan Haywood and Councillor Jane Yates
RESOLVED that the report be noted.

The Director of Property and Construction – Dragonfly, the Director for Economic Development (Devolution), and the Business Growth Manager left the meeting.

LOC63-21/22 BDC DRAGONFLY SHAREHOLDER BOARD MEETING MINUTES

The Chair explained why the BDC Dragonfly Shareholder Board minutes were being presented to the Committee. The Monitoring Officer listed who attended these meetings and explained it was not a decisive meeting, but a consultative one. The intention was to share these minutes to the Committee moving forward.

LOCAL GROWTH SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

The Portfolio Holder for Growth stated a presentation had recently been given to Members explaining the Board and the Dragonfly Development Ltd. company; this may be useful to the Committee.

The Chair raised a concern that there was no risk management of spending on projects presented in the minutes and whether this was this out of the scope of the Shareholder Board. The Monitoring Officer answered that there was a separate internal meeting of the Council which met to discuss risk management across the whole Council, including risks regarding Dragonfly.

The Chair asked what the main function of the Shareholder Board was, and the Monitoring Officer answered that it was to review performance and receive any requests from Dragonfly Development Ltd.; in the Shareholder Board Agreement, there were reserved matters/activities that Dragonfly Development Ltd. could only carry out after receiving the Council's approval.

On a question about the lack of performance information in the minutes, the Monitoring Officer and the Portfolio Holder for Growth explained the relationship was still being defined, and items like performance data would in the future be discussed at Shareholder Board meetings.

Moved by Councillor Duncan Haywood and seconded by Councillor Will Fletcher
RESOLVED that the report be noted.

The meeting concluded at 11:23 hours.