

Bid Summary:

Levelling Up Funds will stimulate growth of Bolsover town's economic and social prosperity, delivering comprehensive physical regeneration. The proposal includes demolishing vacant buildings and constructing a multi-cultural venue providing a theatre / performing space, cinema, food court, and art gallery. Complemented by public realm uplift and connectivity to Bolsover Castle, a shop front improvement scheme and investment in digital connectivity, the town's offer will be enhanced and create a modern, safe, vibrant townscape that can be enjoyed by visitors and all parts of the local community. Environmental sustainability will be embedded throughout to drive forward our ambition for carbon reduction.

Headline:

Overall this was considered to be a bid where there are some key areas that could be improved for future funding applications. Whilst there was evidence of stakeholder engagement and alignment with local and national strategies, more detail could be provided. There was evidence of data analysis and a theory of change, however more granular analysis would have been beneficial and further work on evidencing impacts in line with appraisal guidance would strengthen future applications. Monitoring and evaluation plans were well presented however the deliverability elements of the application is an area that could be significantly improved.

We have provided some more specific feedback below. This has been drafted so as to be as clear and helpful as possible, and to help you to understand how decisions were reached.

Assessment Overview

Strategic Fit:

Relevant stakeholders had been identified, and consultations involved engagement with businesses via a survey, face-to-face meetings, and an open, public event. Both events were well attended, showed support for the different elements of the project and the feedback received had been well captured. It was unclear if this was built on with further stakeholder engagement events and how this and other feedback helped to shape the proposal. Stakeholder engagement could have been strengthened by showing a greater input from arts sector bodies on the proposed cultural hub. Other engagement activities were referenced, but to illustrate their impact evidence of engagement could have been provided.

Context and evidence of local challenges were clearly presented. A link had been made between local challenges, the proposed benefits of intervention and why government investment was needed, but further quantifiable evidence could have strengthened certain parts. Further reflection on the different options considered could have been provided. The case for a cultural provision in the city centre was well explained but this could have benefitted from an explanation on how this offer would, for example, inspire community cohesion/pride and add to the overall attractiveness of Bolsover.

Helpful references were provided to several local/national strategies. The information provided on the strategies set out how the bid aligned to them and other relevant funding streams, such as the UK Shared Prosperity Fund. Alignment had also been made with several Levelling Up White Paper Missions. The link to UK legal and statutory commitments, such as delivering Net Zero and minimising environmental impact, was made but could have been better evidenced.

Economic Case:

The data analysis was included on many key elements, including footfall - and comparators were used where possible. The data that was used was up to date, included comparators and used official sources - although it was not clear what year/time period the statistics used covered. However, there were some limitations in terms of scope - crime, for example was mentioned as higher than average but it was not clear what measure of crime was used, or the degree to which it was higher than average. More granular analysis (e.g., at local authority or ward level) would also have been beneficial. A theory of change was included with correctly identified inputs, activities, and measurable outputs. Outcomes were detailed and were disaggregated between intermediate outcomes and much broader, economy wide outcomes. Logic set out in the application was clear but would be stronger by referencing specific evidence or studies that support the logic set out.

The applicant should review the departmental appraisal guidance and the economic case teach-in on the gov.uk website. The appraisal approach used does not follow the appraisal guidance for impacts - many impacts included were likely to be double counting and not compliant with guidance, and there was no information to suggest that any of the impacts that were compliant with guidance had underpinning methodologies that comply with the guidance. The optimism bias adjustment seemed mostly sensible, albeit the 10% for 'catalyst for change' was lower than it should have been. Additionality had also not been considered in the appraisal.

Deliverability:

Match funding was substantially below the minimum 10% expected and of the sums offered, nearly half was from the parish council and a quarter was in kind as in-kind funding (of which the council will retain ownership); the final quarter was from UK government including UKSPF (UK Shared Prosperity Fund). Councils have the

ability to use UKSPF flexibly, but this did mean that local match funding from the council was only £14k from an overall £15m project.

Furthermore, the bid would have been strengthened if clear evidence of political support had been provided. Providing a cabinet minute and an assessment of the likely return on investment or future revenue financial implications, for example, would have provided clear evidence that the council was fully committed to this proposal.

There were other risks where it would have been helpful to have seen more work completed to demonstrate that the programme was truly deliverable. Such works could have included more advanced designs, a plan for purchasing the shop, pre-application advice - especially important given the potential impact on the conservation area, more detailed costs, support from shop owners, and the preparation of a business plan for project 1. Without these, there was little confidence in the deliverability of the project within the time allowed for the LUF programme.

The Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) section set out a detailed, well-thought-out plan, which explained how it would measure outputs, outcomes and impacts within the costing and planning workbook. It also detailed the methodologies that would be used to evaluate the projects.