

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 Monday 13th March 2023 at 10:00 hours.

PRESENT:

Members: -

Councillor Jen Wilson in the Chair

Councillors Derek Adams, Jim Clifton, David Dixon (from Minute No. LOC56-22/23) and Janet Tait.

Also in attendance at the meeting was Councillor Liz Smyth (Portfolio Holder for Growth) and to Minute No. LOC57-22/23, Councillors Ray Heffer, Mark Hinman, Andrew Joesbury, Clive Moesby, and Graham Parkin.

Officers: - Chris Fridlington (Director of Economic Development, Dragonfly Development Limited), Joanne Green (Partnerships Policy Officer) and Joanne Wilson (Scrutiny & Elections Officer).

LOC51-22/23 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillors Tracey Cannon and Tom Kirkham.

LOC52-22/23 URGENT ITEMS OF BUSINESS

There were no urgent items of business to consider.

LOC53-22/23 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made.

LOC54-22/23 MINUTES OF A MEETING HELD ON 7TH FEBRUARY 2023

Moved by Councillor Derek Adams and seconded by Councillor Jen Wilson
RESOLVED that the Minutes of a Local Growth Scrutiny Committee held on 7th February 2023 be approved as a correct record.

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LOC55-22/23 LIST OF KEY DECISIONS AND ITEMS TO BE CONSIDERED IN PRIVATE

Committee considered the List of Key Decisions and items to be considered in private document.

Moved by Councillor Derek Adams and seconded by Councillor David Dixon **RESOLVED** that the List of Key Decisions and items to be considered in private document be noted.

LOC56-22/23 REVIEW OF TOWN CENTRE REGENERATION FRAMEWORKS – SOUTH NORMANTON

The Scrutiny & Elections Officer explained the various documents that had been presented to Members as part of the review and the approach taken so far.

The Director of Economic Development, Dragonfly Development Limited (DDL), presented a review of the South Normanton Town Centre Regeneration Framework, acknowledging the Committee's original review plan to take each town area in turn. They noted that the Framework had originally been commissioned in autumn 2015 and had highlighted a range of public and private interventions that could be made to improve the town centre and surrounding areas.

As agreed with Committee, officers had produced a scorecard analysing progress against the various elements of the Framework including in surrounding villages and hamlets. On reflection, the Framework document hadn't guided development to a great extent within the area. Many elements remained undelivered as the document had been aspirational in nature requiring additional buy-in from Town and Parish Councils to engage in the development plans themselves. Where funding had not been in place, many ideas had been difficult to deliver.

It was noted that the previous Regeneration Frameworks, to some extent, also sat outside a wider strategy for development and there was not a bank of costed projects ready to put forward to support the area. While the intention of the Frameworks had been to lever investment, the lack of costed projects had made them almost impossible to deliver. As there was an insufficient evidence base within the document, additional research would now be required in order to evidence and cost the projects that could regenerate the town centres. Furthermore, due to the age of the documents, there was no reference to current issues such as carbon reduction, digital connectivity and nature recovery.

The original document was completed back in 2015-17 and did not fit with current community aspirations. The aim of completing the community consultation at the time was to ensure partners were on board with regeneration. The suite of documents overall was potentially too ambitious and very resource intensive to produce. It was highlighted that going forward any new approach to regeneration planning must provide value for money.

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The officer acknowledged that the Frameworks hadn't had the expected impact and it was clear that officers welcomed recommendations from Committee on potential future activity. They noted that it was important that the Council was clear how it could support parishes and that there were clear mechanisms to signpost elsewhere when the Council could not assist. This would also enable the Council to prioritise future action more effectively.

The Director noted that at a previous meeting there had been appetite from the Committee to work closer with parishes particularly for the Clowne framework area and that this would also be a good approach for South Normanton. Of the three core delivery objectives, none had progressed. Of the five Stepping Stone projects, none had progressed. It was noted, however, that South Normanton and all the core villages in the surrounding area had been assessed through the Town Centre Health Check process and all remained stable in terms of their viability as local centres.

A Committee Member noted that there were several good ideas for projects within the Framework but that a number were heavily dependent on securing funding and queried if this was the reason for lack of progression.

The Director confirmed that a significant amount of extra investment was required for delivery, likely a mix of public/private sector investment. The pandemic had impacted reserves for many local businesses which was affecting their day-to-day stability and opportunity to expand. Ideally the area would benefit from government funding aimed at public realm improvements as there were several small schemes identified which would support local businesses, particularly those with premises requiring renovation.

A Ward Member noted that South Normanton in particular did not have any vacant premises. They highlighted that the marketplace area was in need of regeneration but that this always seemed to be low priority, with limited emphasis on how that part of the town could be improved over other priorities. They noted that the town was a key gateway to the District and also one of the biggest employers in the District through the McArthur Glen outlet. This alone should generate the need to ensure the town remained attractive. Furthermore, the Post Mill Centre was an excellent venue for the community and local services. In light of the environmental improvements taking place elsewhere in the District, the creation of a community orchard area and/or land to support the delivery of Forest School activities would be a welcome addition. The Member queried why this area of the District had not been prioritised for improvement sooner.

The Director confirmed that the Growth Plans in Creswell and Shirebrook areas were as a result of submissions to the Local Plan Implementation Group and that Members had prioritised those communities for additional development as a result. Both Members and officers were aware of local concerns where additional development was being proposed in smaller communities. The Director clarified that those supporting the development of plans are sensitive to this. The Council was currently approaching Derbyshire County Council for investment support for shop front improvement schemes. South Normanton had been identified as an area where public realm works were required and recent work in Pinxton had led to proposals for the creation of a wellness hub for the community. It was hoped that monies previously earmarked to support work at Oxcroft House in Bolsover could be redirected for use in South Normanton if a private sector tenant could be secured for Oxcroft House. The Development Team were

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constantly assessing external funding streams available to support development. It was acknowledged that there was also a need to create closer working relationships to the different communities within the south of the District. It was hoped to work with the Leader's Executive and Partnerships team to enable this. The South Normanton area was the most economically productive in the District due to the businesses located there.

A Committee Member noted that they were aware projects had not progressed as planned and agreed with the concerns raised by the Ward Member. They felt new recommendations for action were now required to move forward.

The Director noted that following the upcoming election there would be a renewed emphasis on working with the parishes and building relationships with the new councils. The importance of a medium-term plan was emphasised with clear deadlines for delivery. It was also important to consider alternative uses for vacant premises such as pop-up shops for local start-up business to function as a kick-start.

A Committee Member commented that they felt the issues affecting this Framework area were universal across the District. They welcomed the investment in the Shirebrook area and felt this was well overdue. They also highlighted the issue of connectivity as a big problem in most areas and welcomed the idea of closer parish links.

The Director noted that improving the links to parishes would also help to bring other strands of work together such as s.106 payments.

A Ward Member suggested that each locality within the Framework area would benefit from a small amount of funding to support the initial setup of regeneration schemes and/or feasibility studies. They highlighted work they were aware of in the Erewash area on business improvement and noted the current funding streams being promoted on the local radio.

A Ward Member reiterated that following the election in May it was vital to work with the Partnerships Policy Officers for each area to help facilitate improved local connections and working relationships. They also noted further complications in relation to the completion of highways repairs by Derbyshire County Council (DCC), and delays to the planned extension of the McArthur Glen site. They noted that the Framework area was not a natural area to travel to via bus from other parts of the District, even within the immediate area transport links were very limited. They questioned why other neighbouring areas appeared to have been more successful in securing Town Deals and other external funding and was frustrated by the lack of success in attracting funding resources. It also noted that food bank access was poor within the area with the services only located in South Normanton not the wider communities.

The Director noted that the success of bids by surrounding areas was largely due to them being classed as a priority 1 area, as such they had already been eligible for additional allocations. The District was classified as a priority 2 area and consequently the Council had to work significantly harder to achieve funding bid successes.

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The Scrutiny & Elections Officer reminded Members of the Town Centre Health Checks that had been completed and their recommendations for the development and adoption of local management strategies.

The Director acknowledged that the Health Checks had proved very beneficial and enabled work to progress such as that in Shirebrook at the marketplace. They noted that the Planning Service had a specific workstream looking at vacant premises, with the aim of identifying the owner to ensure the premise was moved on to new uses.

A Ward Member agreed that refreshed communications with parish councils was crucial and that this should involve the Leader's Executive and Partnerships team. They felt that some external partners were more engaged than others when it came to regenerating the area in partnership. They queried the need for a dedicated Funding Officer and whether this would enable a more effective approach. They also believed it was imperative that the Council have more 'shovel-ready' projects developed to enable a quicker application process and reduced missed opportunities. The three areas they felt required most attention was the development of a cycle route within the main town centre within South Normanton, review and redevelopment of the marketplace area, and development of the war memorial.

The Director noted that the service was now in a position to redirect funding previously earmarked for other projects towards improvements and/or feasibility studies in relation to the South Normanton Framework area. Most initial plans or studies would likely need between £10-£20,000 for development. Such an approach could be a recommendation from the review but would require further approval and reports to Executive with costings.

The Portfolio Holder for Growth confirmed the biggest issue facing the Council was our ability to access external funding, which was significantly impacted by the qualification criteria used by the Government as the District simply didn't rank deprived enough.

A Ward Member agreed the District required a bigger and better profile at a national level to secure funding.

The Committee Chair questioned to what extent online shopping had impacted local town centres as they were aware this was having a huge issue nationally. Two of the local Ward Members agreed but noted that the McArthur Glen centre was always busy.

A Ward Member suggested that the ideal Review recommendation would be a partnership approach between Development, Planning and Leader's Executive & Partnership team across all four centres within the Framework Area- South Normanton, Pinxton, Blackwell and Tibshelf. It may also require cross-area or even cross-District work for greenways and cycle routes which would require work with DCC Highways.

Members supported this suggestion and agreed to start with South Normanton as a pilot area, with further roll-out following evaluation of the approach.

Moved by Councillor Jim Clifton and seconded by Councillor Derek Adams
RESOLVED that (1) the contents of the report and appendices be noted,

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(2) the findings for this area be compared with the previous Framework area reviews, as part of the formulation of the final Review report and recommendations,

(3) a pilot approach to re-development/investment be operated in South Normanton and then, following evaluation of its success, rolled out to the remaining other three centres within the South Normanton Framework area.

(Director of Economic Development, DDL/ Business Growth Manager/ Scrutiny & Elections Officer)

LOC57-22/23 BUSINESS GROWTH STRATEGY – MONITORING UPDATE (FULL) 2022/23

The Director presented the update to Members highlighting key points within the report. Members were reminded that the Strategy had been originally developed during the Covid pandemic. The core aim of the Strategy had been for the area to 'build back better', if as per the national approach, including nature recovery. The Director noted that the Development team would be looking to complete a refresh of the Strategy following the upcoming election.

Members were advised that the crematorium project was now nearing the construction phase and that a number of additional projects within the action plans were either complete or in-hand. Furthermore, a Nature Recovery Summit had taken place on 10th February which had received excellent local support.

A Councillor queried what the current situation was with the creation of dragonfly development Ltd and the potential transfer of council staff. The Director confirmed that consultation was currently taking place with staff identified as affected by the creation of the company.

A Councillor sought clarification on the remit of the dedicated Pleasley Mills officer role. The Director confirmed that the aim of the dedicated post was to facilitate the regeneration of the site. The dedicated resource would be in place for a three-year period. A key focus would be on assessing the constraints of the site and improvements that can be made, in addition to looking at new areas where additional rental income could be secured. The Councillor noted that they were pleased to see such progress.

Moved by Councillor David Dixon and seconded by Councillor Jim Clifton
RESOLVED that the report and feedback on progress be noted.

(Director of Economic Development, DDL/ Business Growth Manager)

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LOC58-22/23 DRAFT BUSINESS ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

The Director of Economic Development briefed Members on the draft strategy. It was noted that the Council had benefited from support from an LGA consultant to review existing approaches to business engagement. To date this had not been a priority action for delivery, however work in this area improved during the Covid pandemic and consequently the team realised that greater emphasis was required on business engagement.

It was noted that the Service had recently secured a CRM system to help capture local business information and to track specific needs of the local business community. A substantial proportion of recent engagement had focused on climate change and business support. The service believed a lot of progress was now being made in this area.

The Portfolio Holder for Growth referred to the InBusiness Magazine which was now in circulation and noted that at the start of their four-year term in 2019 the Council had insufficient information to truly know our local businesses. They noted that the Council had transformed their approach. They highlighted that the new CRM system was making an enormous difference and was enabling the Council to share publications and advice on grants, business resilience and best practice.

The Director confirmed there was a notable increase in networking events being held, which had been highly successful in terms of attendance by the local business community. A key piece of information gathered was that local businesses welcomed face-to-face contact rather than web based.

Moved by Councillor Jim Clifton and seconded by Councillor Derek Adams

RESOLVED that (1) the findings and recommendations of the Grant Thornton Business Engagement Strategy Review report be noted,

(2) the formal adoption of a Business Engagement Strategy and Action Plan be supported.

(Director of Economic Development, DDL/ Business Growth Manager)

LOC59-22/23 REVIEW OF INTEGRATION OF SOCIAL VALUE TO BDC POLICY AND DELIVERY – POST-SCRUTINY MONITORING (INTERIM REPORT)

The Scrutiny & Elections Officer advised Members of the progress to date in implementing the recommendations. Two out of six recommendations had been achieved to date and officers from the Leader's Executive and Partnerships Team, Leisure and Development were engaged in the integration of social value. Further work was taking place with officers in the Procurement team to ensure that policies reflect the agreed way forward. The Officer reminded Members that during the course of the Review a draft Social Value Policy had been produced with further work required during the monitoring and implementation phase. Subsequent to the approval of the recommendations by Executive, the opportunity to complete a Business Process

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Review (BPR) of the Council's social value approach in procurement had arisen. The Council had secured support from the LGA to complete this. This had identified the need for a whole Council approach to embedding social value. Although completing the additional review would mean a 6-to-12-month delay in completion of the policy, it would ensure a whole council approach in the long-term leading to better outcomes.

A Councillor noted that 'Social Value' was very much a current buzz word, and they were aware that not everyone was on board with the concept. They queried if the message on the importance of the concept was being conveyed correctly by officers and Members leading on this area. They also stated it was vital that the Council clearly communicated any successes in relation to social value outcomes.

The Director agreed with the sentiment and confirmed full buy-in to the concept was essential to ensure that a whole Council approach and achievements could be celebrated.

The Scrutiny & Elections Officer confirmed that the monitoring period could be extended to allow completion of the Policy and the Director agreed this was the best approach.

Moved by Councillor Derek Adams and seconded by Councillor David Dixon
RESOLVED that (1) the progress against the review recommendations be noted,

(2) Members acknowledge any exceptions to delivery and clarify the additional action required by the service be acknowledged,

(3) Scrutiny Members make their report and findings public, in accordance with Part 4.5.17(4) of the Council's Constitution,

(4) Officers continue to implement the recommendations and a final report in six months' time highlighting exceptions to delivery be submitted.

(Scrutiny & Elections Officer)

LOC60-22/23

LOCAL GROWTH SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME 2022/23

Committee considered their proposed work programme for 2022/23 and noted that this was the final meeting for this committee cycle. The Chair thanked Members present for their input to the work of the Committee. The Chair also noted that Councillor Clifton was retiring after 24 years as a District Councillor and 28 years as Parish Councillor and thanked him for his long and dedicated service.

Moved by Councillor David Dixon and seconded by Councillor Janet Tait
RESOLVED that the Work Programme 2022/23 be noted.

(Scrutiny & Elections Officer)

The formal part of the meeting concluded at 11:30 hours and Members then met as a working party to continue their review work. The working party concluded at 11:51 hours.