

Minute Extract – 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 27th June 2023 at 10:00 hours.

LOC08-23/24 REPORT ON THE LEVELLING UP FUND – ROUND 2 APPLICATION

The Business Growth Manager briefed Members on the outcome of the recent bid. In May 2022, the Government announced a second call for the allocation of the £4.8bn Levelling Up Fund (LUF), investing capital funds into places in need of economic recovery and growth, regeneration, and improved transport connectivity. Investment was targeted against the three themes of Regeneration and town centre, Cultural, and Transport.

As part of the development of LUF, the Index of Priority Places was formulated, ranking lower-tier and unitary authorities based on a combination of metrics, and then used this ranking to award 'priority status' to those areas in Category 1, awarding a capacity fund of £125,000 to all Category 1 places to support the development of their bid submission/s. Bolsover received Category 2 status, so no capacity fund was available for the development of its bid.

The Fund focussed on investment in projects which required less than £20m of funding, and it encouraged bids to include a local financial contribution of at least 10% of total costs. Private sector partners were encouraged to contribute if they stood to benefit from an intervention.

The total amount of grant fund requested from LUF was £14,218,305 with a match funding contribution of £1,242,595 – 8% of the total project costs. It sought 45% of the funding from the Regeneration and Town Centre strand, and then the remaining 55% from the Cultural strand.

The application focussed its delivery around three main project areas, as set out below and also shown in Appendix 1 – Bolsover Town Proposals:

- Purchase, demolition, and redevelopment of the former Co-Operative Foodstore to provide a cultural hub including a cinema; theatre; gallery and exhibition space; food and drinks court; indoor market area. This would have linked through to the redevelopment of Oxcroft House for the cultural industries to base as a business hub.
- Townscape improvements, including a shop front improvement scheme and a comprehensive public realm improvement scheme for the public areas across the town.
- Connectivity through investment in digital connectivity, Internet-of-Things (IOT) and technology to support the visitor experience including parking apps and augmented reality experiences.

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The Council received significant support for the development of a cultural hub from English Heritage, National Trust, and Welbeck Estates amongst others, who were keen to ensure the town had a local venue to display artifacts currently located in London and elsewhere.

Feedback on the bid acknowledged that the gap in match funding, 8% rather than 10%, had been a factor in failure of the bid. The Council were not able to commit any financial resource to the application and was only in a position to contribute its UKSPF (UK Shared Prosperity Fund) allocation, land and buildings, and match funding from Old Bolsover Town Council. While DLUHC encouraged bids to include a local financial contribution of at least 10% of total costs, this could not be met.

Officers also noted that due to the area not qualifying for capacity funding, the bid was not as detailed as other areas, and this had also limited the resource available for local consultation. This was highlighted in the feedback:

“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 Business Growth Manager noted that a workshop was due to take place on 29th June, to look at the creation of a local evidence base for a Round 3 bid. The High Streets Task Force (HSTF) had committed resource to supporting the District Council through the Understanding Your Place Potential. The HSTF last visited Bolsover on 16th March 2023 to undertake an *Unlocking Your Place Potential* diagnostic visit that identified ‘Repositioning’ as our greatest challenge, meaning there was a need to use data and evidence to understand the challenges and identify the priority solutions.

Visit Bolsover was still engaging with local traders and the Council was able to link into this network to both consult and relay key messages/information.

A Member noted that they had only heard positive feedback about the work completed by the team on the bid. They noted that the feedback from DLUHC identified that the Council had not clearly evidenced their commitment to the bid, with minutes of Executive not showing any discussion of the bid prior to submission. They questioned how the Council would ensure there was evidence of clear political support moving forward. As DLUHC had identified this as a weakness it needed to be addressed in a future bid. Another Member agreed that this could only add value to future bids.

The officer noted that there would be more time to develop the Round 3 bid and therefore greater capacity to ensure it featured on the committee programme with regular reports to Executive/Council on development of the scheme. Any Round 3

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bid would look notably different as Oxcroft House was under offer and a number of the vacant buildings identified for inclusion in the bid were now off the market.

The Portfolio Holder for Growth noted that Category 1 areas had received £125,000 in capacity funding and queried what difference this had made to production of the bid submissions. The officer acknowledged that it would have made a huge difference. It would have enabled a third-party check on the bid and could have enabled the team to develop the proposals in much greater detail. This could have included planning applications, building purchases, detailed development plans – as produced by other successful areas. The criteria used to define Category 1 and Category 2 areas was extensive and the government did review this for the Round 2 bids, however, there were some parts of the District that show up as less deprived which skewed the overall deprivation rating for Bolsover.

A Member noted that the bid had only linked to the themes of Regeneration and town centre and Cultural, with no focus on Transport. They queried this decision given the transport issues the area faced. The officer noted that DCC had also been engaged throughout and they had bid in relation to the Transport theme.

A Member questioned what the High Streets Task Force (HSTF) was. The officer noted that they had been in operation since 2016 with a focus on improving high streets across the country. As a national body they offered mentorship and support materials, and support to bid production such as LUF.

A Member questioned whether support for production of the bid had come from Dragonfly as this was not clear in the report. The officer confirmed there had been no support from Dragonfly at the time the bid was produced. The work was completed by six members of the Development team working full time and it would be impossible to quantify the full cost to the Council of producing the bid in-house.

A Member noted that based on the feedback it was clear that the 10% match funding had been 'expected' rather than something that was 'encouraged' and asked how the Council could generate more match funding for a Round 3 bid, should DLUHC state an expected amount. The officer noted that the Council would have more time to develop a Round 3 bid which would allow time to secure additional match funding if required. This could be because of additional commercial development in advance of submitting the bid.

A Member queried what support there had been from the Leader's Executive & Partnerships team as part of the bid and in particular if they had helped with engagement work. The officer confirmed that all the engagement work completed had been delivered by the Development team and the Leader's Executive & Partnerships team had engaged as a consultee like other stakeholders.

A Member noted that the Council had only contributed £14,000 to the overall project that was costed at just over £15m and queried whether a decision for the Council to contribute more should have been considered. The officer noted that due to time constraints when completing the bid, it had not been possible to secure confirmation of additional funds. They acknowledged this was a weakness and had the Council been in a position to obtain the vacant buildings identified this would have provided a

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much higher match figure and enabled more detailed plans to be progressed. Without ownership of the full site identified the bid required the LUF monies to progress further.

The Chair suggested that an additional recommendation to those contained in the report – that an internal group be formed to monitor funding streams and ensure the Council was best placed to act quickly as they arose. Members agreed that the group should include Executive Members, Scrutiny Members, Development team and Leader's Executive & Partnerships team and possibly external partners too.

The Business Growth Manager noted that moving forward Dragonfly Management (Bolsover) Ltd. would lead on formulating funding applications for all economic funding with the Leader's Executive and Partnerships Team supporting community led funding. Funding streams currently being delivered in the area would feature as part of Business Growth Strategy updates going forward.

Moved by Councillor Will Fletcher and seconded by Councillor Janet Tait

RESOLVED that (1) the feedback from DLUHC be noted,

(2) Executive consider the allocation of additional financial resource to support future calls for grant funding both for Levelling Up Fund and other calls for funding to ensure the maximum investment for the District can be captured.

Moved by Councillor Tom Kirkham and seconded by Councillor Will Fletcher

RESOLVED that (3) the creation of an internal group including representatives from Scrutiny, Leader's Executive and Partnership Team, Executive and Dragonfly to identify, action and jointly write bids for future opportunities available via national and regional funding streams be recommended to Executive.

(Scrutiny & Elections Officer /
Business Growth Manager, Dragonfly Management (Bolsover) Ltd./
Executive)