

**Bolsover District Council**

**Meeting of Local Growth Scrutiny 11 December 2023**

**Review of Bolsover District's Regeneration Frameworks**

<b>Classification</b>	This report is public.
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**PURPOSE OF REPORT**

The purpose of this report is twofold:

- to summarise the key findings from the review of the Bolsover District Regeneration Framework undertaken by the Local Growth Scrutiny Committee in 2022/23; and
- to provide recommendations informed by this summary for further consideration by the Committee.

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**REPORT DETAILS**

**1. Background**

- 1.1 In 2017, the Council published the Bolsover District Regeneration Framework (the Regeneration Framework) that consisted of four documents that set out a strategy for a series of public realm improvements and regeneration projects in each of the four largest settlements in the District namely Bolsover, Clowne, Shirebrook and South Normanton, and their respective nearest, neighbouring villages.
- 1.2 It was intended that the Regeneration Framework would be developed alongside the preparation of the now adopted Bolsover District Local Plan (“the Local Plan”) to help shape and influence regeneration of the District over the same fifteen-year plan period from 2018 to 2033 by:
- providing the framework for targeted and coordinated public/private sector interventions;
  - informing funding applications for town centre investment and regeneration;

- addressing the key priorities identified in Joint Economic Development and Housing Strategy;
- forming the basis of work to deliver economic growth and for aligning the district's priorities to maximise inward investment;
- forming part of the evidence base for the emerging Local Plan, informing its place specific policies and proposals;
- highlighting the importance of “place-making”, in matching the pace and nature of growth within the district, aligned with the physical characteristics of each discrete part of the District; and
- raising public awareness of place-making proposals and place marketing leading to improved quality and perception of place.

1.3 A number of these objectives remain important to the Council and its local communities. In addition, achieving many of these objectives will still promote and encourage the ongoing viability and vitality of the local economy and regeneration of the District's high streets. Moreover, the place-making agenda set out in the Regeneration Framework is embedded in the adopted Bolsover District Local Plan.

1.5 However, the current economic and policy context is very different from 2016 when the Regeneration Framework was produced and 2017 when it was adopted by the Council. A series of events including the Covid pandemic and war in Ukraine have disrupted the local, national and global economy and the Joint Economic Development and Housing Strategy has since been superseded by a range of other strategies.

1.6 In addition Bolsover District Council has had two District elections since 2017. Most recently, 21 new Councillors were elected in May 2023. In 2020, the Council adopted its Ambition: Vision Bolsover which superseded all previous Council Plans and corporate performance frameworks. With the emerging East Midlands Combined County Authority and the proposed election of a Regional Mayor in May 2024, the Council is now reviewing and aligning its priorities to ensure it is able to maximise on all potential opportunities.

1.7 Therefore, it is both highly appropriate and timely to review whether the Regeneration Framework remains an appropriate mechanism to promote and encourage strategic priorities in line with the Council's ambition:

*‘To become a dynamic, self-sufficient and flexible Council that delivers excellent services, whilst adapting to local aspirations and acting as the economic and environmental driver for Bolsover District’.*

1.8 Consequently, the purpose of this report is to bring together key findings from the comprehensive review recently undertaken by the Local Growth Scrutiny Committee of each of the four documents that make up the Regeneration Framework.

1.9 The report will then use these key findings and the lessons learned from this review to recommend what could be done if the Regeneration Framework is no longer considered to be the right mechanism to deliver on the Council's growth ambitions for the District over the next four years.

## 2 **Details of Review**

### Methodology

- 2.1 Over four separate meetings, each of the documents in the Regeneration Framework were reviewed in turn within the normal Local Growth Scrutiny Committee meetings. This was done in the following order: Bolsover, Shirebrook, Clowne, and South Normanton. The relevant Ward members, Portfolio Holders and officers from the Partnerships Team and Business Growth Team also attended the meetings as appropriate.
- 2.2 A separate officer report summarising how the Regeneration Framework has been implemented to date and an update on progress against the list of projects set out in the Framework was submitted to each of the four meetings and each report was focused on the place and associated supporting documents under discussion at those meetings.
- 2.3 The officer report included a scorecard that tracked progress on each of the projects listed in the Regeneration Framework. The relevant Town Centre Health Checks (produced by the Planning Policy and Housing Strategy Team) and other relevant documents were included in the agenda pack to provide additional supporting information.
- 2.4 The provision of this information, officer updates and the opportunity for discussion within the meetings allowed the Committee to fully evaluate the following key areas of interest:
- progress to date on all projects identified within the four main settlements;
  - progress to date on all projects identified within the villages and hamlets neighbouring the main settlements;
  - to what extent has the Regeneration Framework enabled the Council to secure funding for development/regeneration; and
  - to what extent would the current Regeneration Framework help the Council address current issues affecting the main settlements and their respective neighbouring villages and hamlets.

The following sections of this report set out the key findings on these points and the lessons learnt that flow from this review.

## Project Delivery

- 2.5 The review identified that a number of regeneration projects listed in the Regeneration Framework had been completed across the District. Where it had not been possible to progress a project because of changes made to the land or buildings identified in the Regeneration Framework since 2017, these were also identified.
- 2.6 It should be noted that the 'pipeline' of projects identified in the Regeneration Framework was intended to be delivered over 15 years. The scorecards completed for the review show the progress that has been made in the first five years since 2017.
- 2.7 The review revealed that there were over 100 separate projects listed and that it was identified that around 50% of these projects were and remain outside of the Council's direct control, and so it is not only easier to see that progress has been made but also that the Regeneration Framework could be said to contain a list of desirable interventions (almost a 'wish list') rather than a deliverable strategic masterplan for the District.
- 2.8 The scorecard approach was useful because it helpfully prompted further discussion around how successful projects have come forward and to what extent the Regeneration Framework is useful in successful project delivery not least by generating inward investment and/or supporting applications made by the Council for Government funding.

## Funding

- 2.9 Throughout the review, it was recognised that funding is a key component of successful project delivery and it was found the Regeneration Framework does not, in itself weigh heavily in decision making on funding applications. In addition, changes in the town centres since 2017 mean that the context of any future funding bids may be different at the time of the application.
- 2.10 In addition, the intervening time between community engagement on the Regeneration Framework, the introduction of the Levelling Up Act and the launch of funding opportunities means that the Regeneration Framework can no longer be relied on to demonstrate an up-to-date link with the needs of the District's local communities as they are today.
- 2.11 Therefore, there is a clear rationale to support the conclusion reached during the review of the Regeneration Framework that it has outlived its useful life (in its current form). In addition, the review highlighted that the Regeneration Framework makes little if no reference to policy issues that have become more prominent since 2017 including active travel, climate action and transition to net zero, biodiversity net gain, 5G and digital connectivity more generally.
- 2.12 However, another key finding from the review was that the lack of costings for any of the projects in the Regeneration Framework is also a significant obstacle to project delivery. In simple terms, if there are no up to date costings, a project cannot be assessed as either affordable or deliverable or even value for money.

- 2.13 Consequently, without any funding identified to carry out any preliminary works on any projects in the Regeneration Framework (typically RIBA Stages 1-3) and without spending a significant amount of money to do this work, it is not possible to conclude how much of the Regeneration Framework remains deliverable.
- 2.14 It is equally not apparent that the Regeneration Framework still sets out the most impactful interventions in light of changes to the policy context, technological advances and changes in the economy since 2017 and it is therefore not possible to conclude that refreshing the Regeneration Framework (as it stands) would be value for money or represent the best mechanism to deliver change across the District over the next four years.

### Place Making

- 2.15 During the process of stakeholder engagement in 2015/16, the Regeneration Framework was successful in capturing a desire to make Bolsover District a better place to live and work, and it was clear from the more recent review of the Regeneration Framework that this desire has not diminished across the Council. That said, it was also clear from representations from some Members that the current Regeneration Framework is no longer a major factor in helping the Council address current issues affecting the main settlements and their respective neighbouring villages and hamlets to any significant extent.
- 2.16 Nonetheless, there is a risk that expectations placed on the Framework and what might be achieved by a review exceed what either or both could or should be expected to deliver. Similarly, there is a risk of ending up in the 'same place' as we are now if the outcome of the review was simply updating the list of projects.
- 2.17 As the review of the Regeneration Framework progressed, there was also an increasing recognition that a public consultation may need to take place to identify up-to-date priority projects that would be demonstrably aligned with the needs of the local community, genuinely create a sense of civic pride and deliver socio-economic and environmental benefits on the ground.
- 2.18 This recognition aligned with the fact that the District's Town and Parish Councils would need to be engaged and closely involved with this place making agenda if it were to be successful and in part, this has since been actioned by the recent and ongoing work on developing a 'place narrative'\*. This work will be significantly strengthened by the 'Investment Plan' development work that has also recently been commissioned.
- 2.19 For the avoidance of doubt a place narrative is a clear compelling story that sums up key elements of places and people in the council area. The narrative will reference location, culture, history future aspiration and community. It will focus on positive future direction while acknowledging any challenges.

### **3. Reasons for Recommendations**

- 3.1 Throughout the review, it was clear that the principles behind the creation of the Regeneration Framework and what it set out to achieve are still relevant – the Framework was intended to improve the quality and perception of Bolsover District as a place and the list of projects were designed to promote and encourage ‘pride in place’ through delivery of a series of projects across the District.
- 3.2 However, it was clear from the review that the Regeneration Framework no longer helps the Council compete for funding and it no longer accurately reflects the needs of the District’s main settlements or their neighbouring hamlets and villages. These tasks are now better done by the Council’s Vision Bolsover and its Ambitions portfolio and the Council’s current work on refreshing Vision Bolsover.
- 3.4 Therefore, it is considered that the Regeneration Frameworks are not updated but used as background documents to the Council’s ongoing work on developing a place-based ‘narrative’ for the District and where appropriate support the preparation of the Council’s Investment Plan that is intended to shape, influence and deliver future economic development and regeneration in the District.
- 3.5 Consequently, it is recommended that this work is endorsed by the Local Growth Scrutiny Committee. Progress on these pieces of work will be brought back in due course.

### **4 Alternative Options and Reasons for Rejection**

- 4.1 Local Growth Scrutiny Committee could choose not to endorse the recommendation made in this report, however, the recommendation has been drafted to align with an overarching strategic approach to the issues raised in the report, planned work and work in progress. Therefore, the recommendation is actionable and within the capacity of the Council to deliver.

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### **RECOMMENDATION(S)**

1. That the Regeneration Frameworks are not updated but are superseded by the Council’s ongoing work to develop a place-based narrative and investment plan as an appropriate mechanism to shape, influence and deliver future economic development and regeneration in the District.
2. That Local Growth Scrutiny Committee receive further reports on the development of these pieces of work in due course.

**IMPLICATIONS:**

**Finance and Risk:**            Yes             No

**Details:** There are no recommendations within this report that require financial resources beyond what is already allocated in the MTFP. Any new Town or Local Centre Management Strategies developed would require further reports to Executive for approval of objectives for delivery by the Council and associated costs.

On behalf of the Section 151 Officer

**Legal (including Data Protection):**    Yes             No

**Details:** In carrying out scrutiny reviews the Council is exercising its scrutiny powers as laid out in Part 1A, s9F(2) of the Local Government Act 2000.

On behalf of the Solicitor to the Council

**Environment:**

**Details:** Across all the Framework areas there are a number of potential projects related to connectivity and the creation of greenways and cycle routes. These are likely to feature as part of the new plans developed and would require additional reports to Executive and input from partner agencies such as Derbyshire County Council.

**Staffing:**    Yes             No

**Details:** There are no staffing implications from this report.

On behalf of the Head of Paid Service

**DECISION INFORMATION**

<p><b>Is the decision a Key Decision?</b> A Key Decision is an executive decision which has a significant impact on two or more District wards or which results in income or expenditure to the Council above the following thresholds:</p> <p><b>Revenue - £75,000</b> <input type="checkbox"/> <b>Capital - £150,000</b> <input type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <i>Please indicate which threshold applies</i></p>	No
<p><b>Is the decision subject to Call-In?</b> <i>(Only Key Decisions are subject to Call-In)</i></p>	No

<b>District Wards Significantly Affected</b>	All Wards
<b>Consultation:</b> <b>Leader / Deputy Leader</b> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <b>Executive</b> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <b>SLT</b> <input type="checkbox"/> <b>Relevant Service Manager</b> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <b>Members</b> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <b>Public</b> <input type="checkbox"/> <b>Other</b> <input type="checkbox"/>	Details:

<b>Links to Council Ambition: Customers, Economy and Environment.</b>
<p>Economy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Working with partners to support enterprise, innovation, jobs and skills</li> <li>• Unlocking Development Potential: unlocking the capacity of major development sites</li> <li>• Making the best use of our assets</li> <li>• Promoting the District and working with partners to increase tourism</li> </ul> <p>Environment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enhancing biodiversity and developing attractive neighbourhoods that residents feel proud of and take responsibility for</li> </ul>

<b>DOCUMENT INFORMATION</b>	
<b>Appendix No</b>	<b>Title</b>

<b>Background Papers</b>
<i>(These are unpublished works which have been relied on to a material extent when preparing the report. They must be listed in the section below. If the report is going to Executive you must provide copies of the background papers).</i>
Previous Local Growth Scrutiny reports on the Regeneration Framework