

## 1. Executive Summary

Ex coal mining communities in Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire were heavily dependent on one single industry and one or two key employers that were the heart of the local economy and bound together the local community. After the closure of the coal mines and supportive industries, these economies and communities truly had their hearts stopped.

### 1.1 Multiple deprivation in Bolsover

Such structural issues cause deep and long term deprivation at many levels, and Bolsover is a clear case of a district suffering multiple deprivation with underperformance seen in employment rates, business survival, property asset values, the condition of the housing stock, learning and skills attainment levels and more. Bolsover is a community that has been unfairly damaged by global markets and political conditions out of their control.

### 1.2 A cocktail of regeneration funding

The need to rebuild and regenerate the area has not been overlooked by regional government, and the district has been successful in attracting many layers of funding including Regionale Charbonnaire (RECHAR 1, and RECHAR 2), European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), DTI assisted status funds and of course Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) and Neighbourhood Renewal Fund (NRF).

Single Regeneration Budget is a flexible funding pot that allows partnerships the option to spend on capital or revenue based items and to run many small projects or a few large ones. Also the make up of the board is very flexible, the local authority is needed to anchor the financial liability but after that the partnership is flexible.

### 1.3 Three SRB schemes; SRB1, SRB3, SRB4

The Bolsover approach to building three SRB bids under SRB1, SRB3 and SRB4 was sensible and well considered. The bids made a good balance between capital spending and revenue spending and delivered a sensible number of projects against key needs that were identified in the baseline.

### 1.4 A good balance of projects

It is sometimes the case that SRB bids deliver too many projects, which makes the administration overhead very hard to manage but this was not the case in Bolsover. Furthermore, the SRB spend was not spread too thinly across themes, so real impact can be seen in some areas, such as housing, environmental improvements, transport, and the creation of business space and employment opportunities from brownfield sites.

### 1.5 £17.8 million of SRB grant over 11 years

It is fair to say that Bolsover suffers from true multiple deprivation, and therefore the question, is SRB funding of £17.8 million over 11 years adequate for the job? Clearly the answer is no, as Bolsover District is still the 46<sup>th</sup> (out of 354) 'worst' district in the country, also recognised by its current regeneration funding status under NRF. However there has been progress because in 2001 the area was ranked 30<sup>th</sup> most deprived in England and in 2004 ranking was 46<sup>th</sup>.

So if the money for regeneration is limited and the opportunities to spend it are large, the grant needs to be spent carefully to have an impact on key issues and needs in the community, it requires a good strategy, a well developed and mature regeneration partnership and a team of committed people who can turn the strategy into delivery.

## **1.6 A quality strategy**

We think that our evaluation shows that all of the above points are evidenced within the Bolsover SRB and we commend the quality of the strategy and the work that has been done. SRB can be rather 'output' obsessed, however by examining the outputs it can be shown and evidenced that there are jobs being created as a result of changing brownfield sites into employment sites, the post mining environment is more attractive and cleaner, the town is better connected to its region via the M1 junction and the train line, the housing stock is being improved and the town centre and the castle are far more sustainable due to the money that has been spent.

## **1.7 Good financial performance**

Importantly, the financial analysis shows that the £17.8m of SRB grant has attracted a further £16.1 million of private sector investment and that it has also attracted a further £25.9 million of public funds. Of course it can be argued that public funds will always be spent eventually whether SRB exists or not, but the private sector investment would not have happened if it were not for the SRB grant. In our experience as SRB evaluators, the private sector is always difficult to engage and manage for public partnerships as they have a different set of agenda as they work for profit maximisation, not community and economic targets, and again the SRB management should be commended for leveraging so much private sector investment.

## **1.8 Housing improvements took priority**

There is no one project or cluster of projects (themes) that had a 'head and shoulders' greater focus or impact than any other. However, housing improvements took the lions share of the SRB spend across all 3 SRB schemes, and possibly the housing projects have had the highest impact on the local community.

## **1.9 A lack of community based projects**

We note that there is a lack of projects dealing with community health issues, crime and community safety, educational attainment and projects for young people and projects for older people. We feel that this is probably justified as the three SRB schemes had to deal with some other very large regeneration issues. As we have noted earlier in this executive summary, it is not good management practise to spread the grant too thinly or try to commission too many projects. That said, it is interesting to note that the current NRF programme is targeting and spending heavily on Crime and Community Safety, that the Chair of the Bolsover Strategic Partnership is from the local Primary Care Trust (PCT) and that projects for community health and young people are gaining priority. It is also important to note that schools are starting to perform at KS2 level but are still performing poorly at GCSEs.

During our first analysis of the projects we reviewed the various projects and spend and thought that the spend of £513,000 on Bolsover Castle may not have been justified given the other priority projects in the area, and noting our comments in the paragraph above. We have changed this point of view with the evidence that the castle now attracts 75,000 visitors a year and is a sustainable and long term asset unique to the town and the community and because the impact of the spend is ongoing post SRB.

### **1.10 Long term impact from SRB**

This is another important point to raise, the longevity of the SRB spend. SRB itself is measured in terms of outputs and outcomes, and an analysis of this can be found in the body of the report. But the measurement of outputs traditionally stops when the SRB funding stops. However, as the three SRB programmes have invested in long term sustainable projects that do not have a large revenue overhead then the benefits of SRB can be considered to be much longer term. For example, the SRB investment into Pleasley Vale Mills was £781,000 – but because the site now receives rent from its tenants, the site is sustainable, as is the Castle due to higher visitor numbers, as is the Robin Hood Line due to passenger receipts. The SRB board has planned the sustainability of the work well and is not handing over a high and unsustainable revenue overhead to Bolsover District Council post SRB (or to the Bolsover LSP). As approximately three quarters of the SRB board are now represented on Bolsover LSP partnership board this is perhaps a fortunate point!

### **1.11 The board 'mix' was right**

The size and mix of regeneration partnerships is an important consideration. Boards that are too small are often seen as rather controlling, especially when they are dominated by the local council and its officers, and boards that have too many representatives often lose sight of strategy and become grant distribution meetings. Again we feel that the board mix was right in Bolsover, in general it had the correct board to deliver projects against baseline need. It is possible however to look at the project mix and conclude that the Community & Voluntary sector was not active enough at board level to generate more community based revenue funded projects. With this in mind we would suggest that some capacity building in the community and voluntary sector is needed within the Bolsover area and this is an opportunity for the NRF funded INVOLVE network.

The Local Strategic Partnership took control of the SRB spending and management in 2000, and subsequently the forward strategy for the board has always been determined by the emergence of the LSPs and the qualification for NRF money. As such the SRB board has segued seamlessly into the LSP and the SRB regeneration strategy has moved on into Neighbourhood based regeneration, primarily funded by NRF.

### **1.12 SRB baseline data was poor, but greatly improved under NRF**

The use of floor targets and other baselines since the start of NRF has greatly improved the evidence base of the regeneration work. It is a criticism of most SRB schemes that the original need quantified in the baseline is not updated and used as evidence of progression. This may appear to be administrative overkill, but conditions change and if the master plan is still delivering, for example, job search assistance when the underlying unemployment rate has fallen from 12% to 4% then this is important to know and react to. Conversely, if the local crime rate has risen, then the empirical evidence of this could be used to plan in some community safety measures. We do not feel that the baseline data was updated sufficiently during the delivery of the three SRB schemes, however, the new regime of baseline analysis under NRF has solved this issue by employing some very high quality baseline analysis and monitoring.

It is fair to conclude that the LSP Board and partnership has been enhanced and strengthened by the SRB schemes and that their approach to regeneration appears to be well developed and mature in terms of partnership working and delivering the regeneration strategy.

### **1.13 A continuity of approach to regeneration for 12 years under SRB and now NRF**

This has given the whole regeneration plan continuity for 12 years now and the value of this is high. Furthermore, the administration and management team have been kept reasonably intact with only five changes to the programme manager over the 11 year SRB period, and three of those occurring within the enterprise PLC contract period. This is also a strength because management changes can take 3-6 months to bed in and multiple changes multiply this disruption. We have recently evaluated an SRB scheme that had 6 managers in 8 years. The effect on the quality of the information base and network of relationships and knowledge was detrimental.

### **1.14 Justifiably, capital spend projects dominated the three SRB schemes, community regeneration is being strengthened under NRF**

Capital projects usually involve council officers, property developers and business agencies and do not by their nature involve the public in any great sense, whereas community (and revenue) based projects get the community involved but often wind down when revenue grant funding ends. The legacy of SRB lies in what is left after the funding winds down and the SRB projects have been delivered. In this case we feel that the Bolsover SRB schemes have left a tangible legacy of sustainable projects that benefit the community in many ways but particularly through a cleaner environment, better transport links, more local job opportunities and improved housing conditions. On the community side it is less clear how much the community networks and confidence has been strengthened by the SRB schemes, but the nature of the spend was always biased towards capital regeneration solutions.

### **1.15 Evaluators' conclusion**

In conclusion the three SRB schemes were well constructed, delivered good outputs with some excellent financial results and the legacy is tangible and long term. The SRB board designed a well considered set of interventions against local need and the LSP has certainly now benefited from the SRB structures, processes and experience. There were some delivery themes that were not covered by the SRB projects even though they were identified as baseline issues (e.g. educational attainment) but these weaknesses were compensated by a well run trio of SRB schemes.