

# MARK FLETCHER MP

Member of Parliament for Bolsover



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

Councillor Ashley Taylor  
Bolsover District Council

[Sent Via Email to ashley.taylor@bolsover.gov.uk]

23 April 2024

Dear Ashley,

Thank you for your email about the £15 million of funding that Labour-run Bolsover District Council are refusing to spend in Bolsover town centre and my campaign **calling on the District Council to keep their promise to the people of Bolsover and spend it on the town centre as intended.**

As you know, I respect you very much and have a huge amount of time for you as an individual. But I am surprise and disappointed to see you, as a Councillor representing Bolsover North and Shuttlewood, siding with the Labour leadership of Bolsover District Council to divert this investment away from Bolsover town centre. We both have a huge amount of affection for Bolsover, and I would hope that you would join me in calling on Cllr Fritchley to do the right thing on this matter. The political games he is playing – to try and make this £15m an issue in the general election at the expense of the people of Bolsover – is unnecessary. We need to rise above such petty games.

As you know, investing in Bolsover town centre has been one of my main priorities since before you were elected. I think regenerating the town centre will help to attract more tourists to this district – creating jobs and bringing more money to the whole area – help to bridge the gap between the castle and the town, help to give residents more pride in their town centre and help to compensate long-standing residents of Bolsover who have seen many new housing estates approved by BDC but very little investment in the town centre.

Thanks to my lobbying efforts, we secured £15 million for that work in the Autumn Statement. That amount would cover the costs of the works in the Levelling Up Bid (including the Coop site, shop improvements and public realm works). **Bolsover District Council put out a press release welcoming the £15m investment when it was announced and stating that it would be spent in Bolsover town centre. Your own Council Leader – Cllr Steve Fritchley - was quoted in it welcoming the proposal. Yet that press release was withdrawn quietly and all the plans changed. I think the people of Bolsover have a right to question why the council have now chosen not to deliver on their promise.**

The simple fact is that the leadership of Bolsover District Council have **chosen** to not prioritise Bolsover town centre for this money. My letter to residents was clear that what was allocated from the Government was not Levelling Up Funding, it was Place Based Funding. While this does allow money to be spent in different places, **it is not a requirement that the money is spent in different places; Bolsover District Council – with your support – is choosing to spend the money elsewhere.**

Hundreds of local residents were given the facts and have signed a petition asking the Council to reconsider. I know that – following the delivery of my letter to all residents in Bolsover – you and the other Labour Councillors representing Bolsover had a crisis meeting with your leader. A statement was subsequently put out by Bolsover District Council, finally updating residents on the different plans, and that statement was shared by all of Labour Party Facebook Groups across the constituency.

The political capital that the Labour Party is seeking to make out of this reaffirms my original accusation: **the choice to not spend the money in Bolsover town centre is a political strategy. This is the Bolsover Labour Party trying to play politics with taxpayers' money. Rather than honour the agreement we had to spend £15m on Bolsover town centre – as demonstrated by the levelling up bid we all agreed on – the money is being spent on the pet projects of other Councillors close to Cllr Fritchley. You would rather I lose than the people of Bolsover win.**



Interestingly two months ago – long before the investment plan had been submitted by Bolsover District Council - the local Labour Party were putting out leaflets in the constituency stating that they would “Make sure Bolsover gets the £15m we’ve been promised”. I find it curious that these leaflets were going out when the money had already been secured. I was there when the Chancellor announced it at the Autumn Statement. **I think it is clear that these leaflets were put out because the local Labour Party have created a situation where this money is at risk – as a campaigning strategy – by ensuring it is spent on projects that it wasn’t originally intended for, and to which they know I will be unwilling to give my backing.**

The criteria for this funding requires the Council to demonstrate the support of the local MP and other stakeholders. I was not consulted between 22<sup>nd</sup> November – when the money was announced – and 23<sup>rd</sup> January. It was only when I met the Leader of the Council on the 23<sup>rd</sup> January that I was notified that the Council wished to dilute the funding across the district. **Yet the Council’s website had already quietly been updated to remove the press release welcoming the £15m for Bolsover town centre in that time.**

The list of projects put forward by Bolsover District Council lack ambition, coherence and will have little to no lasting economic impact. They are largely failed pet projects for Councillors loyal to Cllr Fritchley which are being recycled and rehashed from other bids. I make no apology for demanding more for local residents, not just in Bolsover but across the entire district.

To the best of my knowledge, Bolsover District Council and its leadership did absolutely nothing to secure this £15m. I worked tirelessly to secure this investment into our community, and I was clear in every single meeting that the money was for Bolsover town centre. Now the local Labour Party are trying to undermine that work; choosing to spend it on other projects and other areas and breaking their promises to Bolsover residents. I know that the local Labour Party are used to operating without scrutiny and doing whatever they want without consequences; but I will not stand idly by whilst residents are betrayed. **Honouring the agreement we had with the Levelling Up Bid – and which the Council itself indicated they would do when they put out their press release welcoming the funding – is to my mind the decent course of action;** I hope you and the other Councillors representing Bolsover will support that.

You posed a number of questions in your email, allow me to answer them here:

1) I am unsure where you have got £6m from. The projects listed specifically for Bolsover are the purchase and conversion of a pub and the purchase and conversion of a shop. These amount to less than £2.5m. Some other schemes listed mention Bolsover as one of eight places benefiting. That is considerably less than the £15m originally discussed. And I’m calling on Bolsover District Council – where you represent Bolsover and Shuttlewood - to revise those plans.

2) The loophole is that the money allocated was Place-Based Funding, rather than Levelling Up Funding. Again, there is no requirement for BDC to spend the money elsewhere; they are choosing to do so. **I think Bolsover District Council should honour the original agreement and spend the money in Bolsover.**

3) The deliverability of the projects is a subjective assessment by your own Council. I would say it is reflective of Bolsover District Council’s lack of ambition that they think these projects will take too long. However, assuming the officers are correct and a project like the Coop will take a little longer than 2 years, why didn’t they ask DHLUC for an extension, given the scale of the project? Such an extension is perfectly common, and likely to have been accepted. But – to the best of my knowledge – Bolsover District Council haven’t asked for an extension. Why?

In a meeting with the Council’s Chief Executive on 13 March I was clear that “I’m not going to die in a ditch about projects like the Co-op, as much as I would love to do it”. In fact, I would be more than happy to see the money spent on other projects in Bolsover, which I think would honour the original agreement. No other ideas for projects were forthcoming.



4 and 5) As above. I would gently point out that I'm not sure saying that the only current plans Bolsover District Council has for Bolsover that can be done within 2 years is buying a shop and a pub and converting them, reflects particularly well on the Council and its ambitions.

I have to admit I am slightly confused as to why you think I was 'asked to identify additional projects within Bolsover that could meet the criteria' but I '[did] not put forward any alternative Bolsover projects that can be delivered within the timeframe'. I have never been asked to propose alternative projects and that is with good reason – why would I be the one responsible for drawing up projects and testing them against the criteria given to the Council (and not me) by the Department? Bolsover District Council are responsible for drawing up and submitting the list of proposals and you have employed some fantastic officers for this exact reason - I just have to either support or not support the list.

I would have preferred to have been more involved in choosing the projects but it was made clear to me on numerous occasions that the list drawn up by BDC was not open to reconsideration. This could not have been made clearer than following my meeting with your Chief Executive. During this meeting, I proposed that she should task officers from the Council with coming up with alternative deliverable projects within the town. She agreed to do this work and present me with an alternative bid which would be on the hypothetical assumption that the money had to be spent in the town. Unfortunately, this work was seemingly never completed.

6) I did not submit the Levelling Up Bid for Bolsover town centre, Bolsover District Council did. Interestingly, that same – false – accusation was made in the January edition of InTouch, the Council's taxpayer funded newspaper. An apology has featured in the latest edition.

7) See above comments on deliverability, ambition and – if required - possible extensions.

8) As far as I'm aware, BDC are exploring whether they could secure Arts Council funding. They haven't applied for it yet. I'm also not entirely sure why this is relevant to the £15 million of funding Bolsover town will no longer be getting. I support the Council applying to a wide range of funds to fund projects in Bolsover or any part of the district, and if a good bid is put forward I would always be willing to give it support.

9) I don't quite understand your point here. How will businesses benefit from the way BDC wishes the £15m to be spent? A few shop fronts might improve in different places, but – as we've seen with the shop frontage scheme in Shirebrook – unless you target one specific place and aim for a big impact, good will is no substitute for proper investment. Certainly businesses won't benefit from the village halls the money is currently funding. And I am very conscious of the shop owners in Bolsover who are complaining of falling footfall. The £15m, if spent wisely, could help to bring more tourists to the town. To link up the castle and the town. And to drastically improve the aesthetic. It is for those business owners, and for local residents, that I sent the letter out in the first place.

I have answered all of your questions clearly and in good faith. I hope the answers have provided you with enough information to join me in calling for Bolsover District Council to revert to their original plans of investing in Bolsover.

Yours sincerely,

**MARK FLETCHER MP**  
**MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT FOR BOLSOVER**