

Contact Officer: Nicola Sylvester

Dewsbury Town Board

Thursday 1st May 2025

Present: Keith Ramsay (Chair)
Councillor Graham Turner
Councillor Nosheen Dad
Chief Supt Jim Griffiths
Anis Dadu
Martin Walsh
Sophie Johnson
Peter Mason
Helen Rose
Iqbal Mohamed

In attendance: David Shepherd, Executive Director for Place
Joanne Bartholomew, Service Director, Development
David Wildman, Acting Head of Town Centres
Michelle Illingworth, Project Officer
Helen Jakes, Communication Business Partner

Observers: Councillor Nosheen Dad
Richard Thorpe, Ministry of Housing, Communities and
Local Government

Apologies: Fara Butt
Charlie Dunn
Anum Rehman
Palvinder Singh

- 1 Membership of Dewsbury Neighbourhood Board**
Apologies were received on behalf of Palvinder Singh, Anum Rehman, Charlie Dunn and Fara Butt.
- 2 Declaration of Interests**
No interests were declared.

3 Minutes of Previous Meeting

Iqbal Mohamad, Member of Parliament (MP) recommended that the Board resolve to include in the minutes questions asked by Board Members and the answers from Board Members or council officers, to include all information, disagreements, or corrections. The recommendation was not seconded, however, Board Members did suggest that at future meetings, where Board Members would like details included in the minutes, they should indicate this during the meeting.

RESOLVED –

- 1) That the minutes of the meeting held on 26th March 2024 be approved as a correct record.
- 2) That the minutes of the meeting held on 6th February be approved as a correct record subject to the following amendment to minute item 7.
 - “Mr Mohamed raised the issue about the permanent closure of Dewsbury Sports Centre, it’s adverse impact on the potential success of various Dewsbury Town Projects and enquired if the Dewsbury Town Board can help with the repair and reopening
 - Discussion took place on the potential associated costs of reopening the sports centre, which highlighted different views from Mr Mohammed and Joanne Bartholomew in relation to costs quoted in the KMBC Cabinet report of 5 November 2024 in respect of wet and dry side re-opening. Joanne Bartholemew offered to have a discussion outside the meeting on the figures in the Cabinet report, when the report was to hand, which would allow her to clearly explain the exact figures quoted and the technicalities around the building.”

4 Admission of the Public

All items were considered in public.

5 Public Question Time

Question from Gill Young:

“Our MP is currently actively requesting central government support to meet the costs estimated by Kirklees Council to reopen Dewsbury Sports Centre. The Board’s own Investment Plan text talks about our town’s ‘assets, opportunities and challenges’ and the saving of and reopening of Dewsbury Sports Centre is seen as an asset, an opportunity and a challenge to many local residents. Will the Town Board endorse our MP’s actions and agree to support the reopening of our vital centre when the funds are agreed so that their other aspirations for the development of the town are encouraged?”

RESOLVED –

A response was provided by the Chair.

Dewsbury Neighbourhood Board - 1 May 2025

6 Deputations/Petitions

No deputations or petitions were received.

7 Chairs Update

The Chair provided an update on the following:

- That Dewsbury Town Board had been renamed to Dewsbury Neighbourhood Board in response to new government guidance.
- Sue Baker and Sam Heaton had resigned from the Board and were thanked for their contributions.
- Councillor Nosheen Dad had been appointed a member of the Board and was attending meetings from the next meeting in August 2025 when her term of office as Mayor of Kirklees had completed.
- Agendas and associated documents for Dewsbury Neighbourhood Board was to be sent electronically to Board Members for future meetings, this was in line with Kirklees Council,
- The Chair had resigned from the Board and would be leaving in late summer/early autumn 2025 once Kirklees Council had recruited a replacement. The process for recruiting a Chair to the Board would be circulated to Board Members.

RESOLVED- That the Chairs update be noted.

8 Response to questions and suggestions from Town Board Members regarding Dewsbury Sports Centre

The Board received a report responding to questions and suggestions from Town Board Members regarding Dewsbury Sports Centre (DSC). Joanne Bartholomew, Service Director of Development, advised that the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) had been contacted to confirm details of the Town Boards funding, along with the future Neighbourhood Plan funding.

Richard Thorpe, MHCLG informed the Board that funding had been allocated in 2021 and approved based on plans submitted at that time. The programme was ending, and Government was moving forward to a devolved approach to local growth funding. The Board noted that the project adjustment request process had been put in place to accommodate the transfer of funds between projects where there had been viability issues. MHCLG did not advocate cancelling projects and bringing in new activity, as the programme was in the final stages. Plan for Neighbourhoods' intention was small scale capital, £2 million a year, with 25% revenue.

The Board advised that they welcomed any success in securing funding from Central Government for a new Sports Centre in Dewsbury.

Iqbal Mohamed MP advised the Board that he had met with the Minister of the Department of Culture, Media and Sport following a request for funding to secure Dewsbury Sports Centre. Although no decision had been made, Mr Mohamed felt it was unlikely in the context of the new governments' current financial restraints that funding would be found.

Dewsbury Neighbourhood Board - 1 May 2025

Mr Mohamed, MP made a presentation to the Board on Dewsbury Sports Centre that included:

- Background and Development of the Sports Centre
- Impact on the Community
- Survey Timeline and Closure Controversy
- Survey Recommendations
- Possible Council Actions
- Options 1 and 2 from the Cabinet report.
- Recommendations.

Jim Griffiths, Chief Superintendent, West Yorkshire Police informed the Board that there was no evidence of increased crime, either by gangs or in anti-social behaviour relating to the closure of Dewsbury Sports Centre.

Mr Mohamed recommended that the Board resolve the following:

- 1) That the Board requests access to all the relevant documents relating to the Sports Centre from Kirklees Council.
- 2) That the Board facilitates and funds a full intrusive structural survey of the wet side by obtaining three independent quotes from suppliers and selecting a surveyor independent of Kirklees Council.
- 3) That the Board receive the intrusive survey report which would include updated repair and reopening costs based on the findings, and requests that the Board take a vote at a future meeting to repurpose the required funds from existing projects to repair and reopen DSC.

David Shepherd, Executive Director for Place, advised the Board that due process had been followed by Kirklees Council.

The recommendation was not seconded by Board Members, as it was noted that Dewsbury Sports Centre was not an asset of the Board, and it was the decision of Kirklees Council to close the sports centre.

During discussion, the Board reiterated its response to the Sports Centre which included:

- An Understanding from MHCLG that there was not the flexibility or amount needed within the Dewsbury Town Board or Neighbourhood Board funding to reopen the Dewsbury Sports Centre.
- Recognising the need for Board Members to help manage the expectations of the public in terms of the funds available to Dewsbury Town/Neighbourhood Board and the restrictions on how it could be spent.
- Acknowledging there were passionate feelings about the need for a Sports centre in Dewsbury from the public.
- Supporting any requests for funding from Central Government for a sports centre in Dewsbury.
- Considering and contributing to the strategic needs assessment Kirklees Council was undertaking to explore approaches to address health, wellbeing,

Dewsbury Neighbourhood Board - 1 May 2025

and social needs of the Dewsbury population, which was out to tender and would be commissioned shortly.

- Discussing ways in which the Board could support the outcomes of the strategic needs assessment.

Mr Mohamed commented on other funded projects where assets were owned by the Council such as the Market and felt that the area covered by the Town Board Fund was limited. Mr Mohamed also commented that he felt information regarding the Town Deal Fund boundary was incorrect due to previously being advised that Dewsbury Sports Centre was outside of the boundary, and he felt that decisions made by the Board were based on the incorrect information.

RESOLVED –

That the report be noted.

9 Footfall Data, Dewsbury Town Centre report

The Board received a report on Footfall Data in Dewsbury Town Centre. David Wildman, Acting Head of Town Centres advised that the report provided a summary of pedestrian footfall data which was presented in Appendix A of the report.

The Board noted that footfall in Dewsbury Town Centre had declined for many decades, however, the Dewsbury Town Investment Plan was currently underway/under development which would help to increase footfall. The ten-year regeneration plan would also help to identify projects that could support increased activity in the town centre. It was recommended that for transparency, footfall data be shared at least twice a year on the Boards website. This would demonstrate how footfall was changing and could capture the impact of specific events in the town.

During discussion the Board requested further information on the route causes of declining footfall, it was noted that trends identified general decline in towns which other towns across West Yorkshire had also experienced.

RESOLVED-

- 1) That the Footfall Data, Dewsbury Town Centre report be noted,
- 2) That the website for Dewsbury Neighbourhood Board be updated to include:
 - (i) Footfall data,
 - (ii) Information to ensure visibility of available data be shared twice yearly,
- 3) That Board be provided with further information regarding the decrease in footfall in Dewsbury Town Centre over the last two years at a Board strategy day.

10 Plan for Neighbourhoods Update

The Board received an update on the plan for Neighbourhoods. David Wildman, Acting Head of Town Centres advised that in March 2025 Government confirmed that the Long-term plan programme would remain but would be known as Plan for Neighbourhoods with new guidance being released. As part of the new guidance, the government requested the establishment of Neighbourhood Boards. Each Board would work in partnership with the community and local authority to develop a 'Regeneration Plan' setting out a vision for the next decade alongside a more detailed four year 'Investment Plan'. The deadline for submission of the Regeneration Plan was Winter 2025. The Plan was to set out the activities to be

Dewsbury Neighbourhood Board - 1 May 2025

delivered to achieve the three strategic objectives of the Plan for Neighbourhoods programme which were, Thriving Places, Stronger Communities, Taking Back Control. To support the development of the Regeneration Plan, an additional £200,000 capacity funding would be released in the 2025/26 financial year. This funding would only be made on completion of Board Member and boundary arrangements being agreed by MHCLG. A deadline set to confirm Neighbourhood Board Membership and boundary was 22nd April 2025.

The Board noted that Kirklees Officers had met with Government Officers from the Plan for Neighbourhoods who had visited and received a tour of Dewsbury.

During discussion, the Chair specified the importance of Board Members attending meetings in August and November 2025 as scrutiny and oversight of the plans would take place at those meetings prior to submission to Government.

RESOLVED-

- 1) That the Plan for Neighbourhoods update be noted,
- 2) That the current Terms of Reference undergo a review with updates and amendments being made as necessary during the development of the Regeneration Plan (May to December 2025),
- 3) That the final version of the Terms of Reference be submitted to Board for approval,
- 4) That the Board commits to attending meetings and workshops to support the development of the Regeneration Plan,
- 5) That the Board considers a report on the high-level programme for the draft Regeneration Plan in the November 2025 Board meeting, prior to submission to Government in December 2025.

11 Capacity Funding for Engagement

The Board received a report on Capacity Funding for Engagement. David Wildman, Acting Head of Town Centres explained that the Plan for Neighbourhoods guidance had been updated with priority changes which needed to be reflected in the Regeneration Plan, with the funding for delivery being delayed by a financial year. However, £200,000 of capacity funding had been allocated to support development of the Regeneration Plan for Dewsbury in 2025/26. To enable further engagement to take place that would build on the engagement activities undertaken in Summer/Autumn 2024, approximately one third (£66,000) of the capacity funding would be required. The distribution of funding would enable engagement and communication activities, supported by Kirklees Council consultation team and project officers. Events would be planned and delivered through this allocated resourcing and promoted through existing Board platforms.

Mr Wildman advised the Board that the £66,000 of capacity funding would be broken down as follows:

- £10,000 Event Led Engagement
- £20,000 Business Engagement
- £13,000 Communications/Profile
- £23,000 Events, planning, and resourcing

Dewsbury Neighbourhood Board - 1 May 2025

During discussion, the Board suggested that measurables of spending should be provided to ensure transparency. The Chair advised that an evaluation of investment of money would be provided to the Board.

RESOLVED-

- 1) That the Plan for Neighbourhoods Capacity Funding for Engagement report be noted,
- 2) That the Board agrees that £66,000 of the expected £200,000 Ministry for Housing Communities and Local Government capacity funding (2025/26) be allocated to support engagement activities as part of the Plan for Neighbourhoods on receipt of the funds.

12 Town Deal Project Update

The Board received a report updating the current position of Dewsbury projects outlined in the Town Investment Plan, which included:

- The Arcade
- Civic Spaces and Memorial Gardens
- Construction Skills Village
- Sustainable Transport Modes
- Dewsbury Market and Urban Realm

David Wildman, Acting Head of Town Centres advised that following a strategy day with Board Members there was a suggestion to improve the content of progress/programme and funding risks in the report to provide further details on project risks.

The Chair of the Board commented on the judicial review of Chidswell site and asked if support was needed to be given to Kirklees College to identify a different site for the skills hub. Helen Rose, Kirklees College explained that Kirklees College were exploring options.

The Board noted that the complexities on the Arcade project included structural challenges with the build project.

RESOLVED- That the Dewsbury Town Deal Project Update be noted.

13 Communication Update

The Board received a verbal Communication update from Helen Jakes, Communication Business Partner, Kirklees Council who advised that there would be an engagement site at Dewsbury Market where the public could visit and receive updated information on the Market plans and wider Dewsbury Blueprint. The engagement site would remain at the Market site until later in the year where it would then move to the Town Centre.

Ms Jakes explained that options were being considered around making the Blueprint presence more visible in the Town Centre, however, this would be dependent on funding.

One of the priorities for the team was to source cover due to the end of Counter Contexts contract. Kirklees Council had offered to support for a limited period to

Dewsbury Neighbourhood Board - 1 May 2025

ensure that Dewsbury Neighbourhood Boards communication channels remained active until another contract was in place.

During consideration of this item, the Board asked what other promotional work was taking place around the town centre to advertise projects. Ms Jakes advised that there were boards planned to be placed outside the town hall later in the year, with the engagement container being located around that area.

The Board noted that Council Officers were exploring empty shops in the town centre to promote artwork which was vibrant and would catch the public's attention. The precinct was an area that was being considered. Iqbal Mohamed MP offered the use of his surgeries to help promote activities.

RESOLVED- That the Communication Update be noted

14 **AOB**

Peter Mason, Board Member commented on Active Travel across Dewsbury, due to the new properties that were being built by the Riverside and raised concerns on how people would travel into the town Centre. Mr Mason proposed and was seconded by the Chair that regular updates on active travel in Dewsbury be provided at future meetings. The Chair suggested that Officers consult with West Yorkshire Combined Authority regarding information they could provide.

Cllr Turner advised that Kirklees Council was aware of the issues regarding active travel and confirmed that discussions were taking place across Kirklees Council.

RESOLVED

- 1) That the Active Travel update be noted.
- 2) That regular updates on Active Travel across Dewsbury be considered at future meetings.

15 **Date of Next Meeting**

7th August 2025

Location: Dewsbury Town Hall.