

Dewsbury Town Investment Plan – Youth Engagement Brief

March 2022

1. Overview

Dewsbury has one of the youngest and most diverse populations of any town in the UK. It's fallen a long way from its prosperous industrial past to become a fragmented town and community where its potential is not being realised due to a lack of opportunity, market interest and confidence.

The town has a long, vibrant history at the heart of West Yorkshire and its incredible industrial heritage. Dewsbury's original prosperity is rooted in 'heavy woollen' industry of the Victorian era and although some textile related activity still exists this is much reduced from its heyday. However, the legacy of Dewsbury's industrial past still predominates across the town through its high quality Victorian architectural / built heritage.

Industrial decline

Despite Dewsbury's prosperous industrial past, the town has suffered a long and painful industrial decline throughout the second half of the 20th century and into the 21st century. The once large, bustling market has seen its vibrancy reduced, vacancies have increased, and the popular historic Arcade has been closed for years.

Dewsbury today

The town is a relatively small and ethnically diverse town of 62,000 people with 35% of the population having an ethnic origin outside of the UK, predominately of South Asian origin, originally attracted by the opportunities in textiles industry. There are companies and people with higher skilled jobs and income; but compared to national, regional and local benchmarks, Dewsbury compares poorly in terms of educational qualifications, skills, health. employment levels and wages.

Market failure in the town is persistent. The town has struggled to attract Investors due to potential projects being commercially unviable. This lack of development in Dewsbury due to low development values evidence and further exacerbates this issue in a vicious cycle of low investor confidence.

The lack of investment and economic activity in the town has led to a more insular, fragmented community, which is a real tragedy given the rich diversity within the community is one of the town's strongest assets.

Along with its heritage, which is still evident through the attractive town centre buildings and its excellent location and transport links (easy access to motorway rail network with proximity to Huddersfield, Leeds and Manchester), the greatest asset Dewsbury has is its people.

2. So, what is being done to support Dewsbury?

In September 2019, the government invited 101 places to develop proposals for a Town Deal, as part of the £3.6billion Towns Fund. The Towns Fund is part of the government's plan for levelling up the UK economy and the overarching aims of the Towns Fund are to drive the

sustainable economic regeneration of towns and to deliver long term economic and productivity growth. This will be done through:

- **Urban regeneration, planning and land use:** ensuring towns are thriving places for people to live and work, by increasing density in town centres; strengthening local economic assets including local cultural assets; site acquisition, remediation, preparation, regeneration; and making full use of planning tools to bring strategic direction and change.
- **Skills and enterprise infrastructure:** driving private sector investment and ensuring towns have the space to support skills and small business development.
- **Connectivity:** developing local transport schemes that complement regional and national networks, as well as supporting the delivery of improved digital connectivity.

The Town Fund will be crucial to providing Dewsbury with much needed funding support that will act as a catalyst to build on its heritage and boost the local economy, bringing jobs, culture and leisure opportunities and eventually much needed private sector investment, particularly to the town centre. Most of all, the people of Dewsbury will be reconnected with a sense of pride in their town.

The Dewsbury Town Investment Plan (“TIP”) establishes the vision for the town and how the c£25m from the Towns Fund will provide much-needed investment to boost Dewsbury’s economy and long-term prosperity.

The TIP includes nine projects that will directly improve vibrancy in the town centre and bring people together through:

- Town centre living
- Repurposing vacant buildings
- Improving the Market
- Developing a creative and cultural sector
- Improving public spaces and creating a new town park

3. Town Investment Projects

A summary of the nine projects is set out below –

The Arcade

The project involves the reopening of the vacant Grade 2 listed Victorian Arcade, for small, local independent businesses. The focus will be on businesses in the creative sector

The project will deliver 21 refurbished ground floor business units. The upper floors will offer opportunities for further business space including for the creative industries, and the use and configuration of this space will be explored as part of the design process.

Dewsbury Market

Dewsbury Market is at the physical and economic heart of the town centre. Its health is critical to the vibrancy of the town centre as a whole. The Market will undergo a 'root and branch' change in order to create a model market for the 21st century. The project will involve a complete overhaul of the physical fabric, changes to product offer, introduction of leisure and improvements in operational practices.

Urban Realm

The aim of the Urban Realm programme is to deliver a number of projects that will improve the publicly accessible spaces within the town centre. Urban Realm comprises of both large- and small-scale projects, the largest being the creation of the Town Park which is proposed to be created within the memorial gardens and customer service centre

Creative Cultural Programme

The new arts and cultural centre (Union), creative social enterprise and production hub and a year-round programme of cultural activities and events to animate the town and bring communities together. It will provide new cultural infrastructure and enable a creative community to develop and create entertainment and cultural experiences developed and co-produced with Dewsbury's communities. Union will include performance spaces, meeting and exhibition space and studios for music, performance and visual art.

Programmed with and by local artists and communities, inspired by and celebrating the many voices, cultures and communities of Dewsbury, it will host poetry slams, exhibitions, film screenings, family friendly theatre, creative activities for children and training for young adults.

The broader cultural programme will see a series of activity that come together in major public events.

Building Revival

The Building Revival scheme is aimed at improving shop fronts to a Conservation Area Standard and support for the conversion of buildings to office / workspace & residential where appropriate.

The project objective to grow momentum through the Dewsbury Townscape Heritage Initiative, in improving shopfronts in line with Conversation Area principles, thus raising the profile and quality of the area.

The scheme involves providing grant assistance to owners in providing quality accommodation, prompting property owners to think differently about conversions, through using spaces more creatively - creating live/workspaces, rather than just plain box conversions.

Daisy Hill Neighbourhood

The project will undertake the critical first steps on the road to creating a new neighbourhood of circa 200 homes at the heart of Dewsbury, which will support town centre vibrancy and make the most of the heritage assets of the town. It is comprised of two parts:

- The first phase which is the conversion of the vacant grade 2 listed Field House building into 23 high quality apartments and a restaurant / bar.

- The acquisition of land and buildings to create a single development opportunity of a scale necessary to deliver the desired outcomes.

The project will set a new standard for quality of residential accommodation in Dewsbury Town Centre and will attract occupiers with disposable incomes that will help support the town centre economy.

Construction Skills Village

A multi-purpose skills and education centre for the construction and built environment sectors, located at the heart of one of Kirklees's largest housing sites, Dewsbury Riverside. Developed in partnership with Kirklees College and industry partners, the project will provide:

- an exciting new facility to engage young people and raise awareness of careers in the industry
- a safe/secure environment, within a major housing site, to deliver a wide range of construction training to young people, unemployed adults and other target groups
- a leading-edge training facility specialising in modern methods of construction and low carbon energy, delivering a wide range of industry-focused short-courses.

Full Fibre – digital connectivity

This project is to facilitate the installation of a full fibre network into key buildings in Dewsbury town centre.

The project will provide a new primary duct network that links all key TIP projects in the town centre; along with key Council buildings.

Sustainable Transport Modes

A transformational programme of walking and cycling infrastructure improvements within Dewsbury delivering a high-quality network connecting key transport nodes.

The proposed new footway/cycleway facilities would offer greater pedestrian and cycling connectivity in the North-east of Dewsbury Town Centre and better access to Town Centre and college sites. The scheme incorporates a new two-way cycle track alongside the footway to enable and encourage modal shift to bike through creation of a safer, more attractive environment for cyclists.

The TIP is available to view on the Town Board website - [Dewsbury Town Board | Kirklees Council](#)

4. Youth Engagement

As noted above Dewsbury has one of the youngest and most diverse population of any town in the UK. It is important to ensure that they are represented and included in the forward planning for the regeneration of Dewsbury Town Centre. Historically the Council have undertaken several consultation and engagement exercises to communicate directly with the

public and gather opinions on the plans on the regeneration project outlined in the Town Investment Plan. However, the percentage of people that participated within the consultation exercises to date within the under 25's category has been relatively low.

The Dewsbury Town Board chair along with the Town Board members which includes the Principle of Kirklees College are keen to ensure that people within the under 25's category have the opportunity to engage and voice their thoughts and opinions around future decisions for the town. It was therefore suggested by the Town Board chair that the board look to seek options around how the youth voice could be represented. It was suggested that a Youth Group could be formed which would be led by Kirklees College as they are best placed to engage with the students having two educational facilities within the town centre: Pioneer House and Springfield Centre.

The aim of the Youth Voice Champion Group would be for them to consider several questions around the regeneration of Dewsbury Town Centre which in turn would stimulate discussion. These questions could be tailored around the Strategic Development Framework themes upon which the Town Investment Plan projects are based upon. These are as follows –

- Increasing Activity- There is a need for more activity in the town centre. This will be addressed in part by introducing new uses e.g. Residential and educational uses in the centre, consolidating and improving existing Market.
- Improving attractiveness – The town needs to be a place that looks good and is pleasant to spend time in
- Improving Accessibility- The town centre needs to be accessible to all

The following questions have been proposed by the Town Board, Kirklees College and Regeneration Officers within the Council and could be explored during the workshop sessions –

Increasing Activity

1. What do you think needs to happen to bring more footfall into the town centre?
2. How could this be applied specifically to the youth sector.
3. What are the barriers to increasing footfall in the town centre?

Increasing Attractiveness

1. What is your perspective on personal safety in the town centre, especially around the different community groups?
2. How safe do you feel when visiting Dewsbury?
3. What could be done to improve the safety in Dewsbury

4. Streets and Space – what do you feel around the current design of the spaces in the town centre?
5. What are your thoughts around the standards of cleanliness of the town? Who do you think is responsible and why? What do you think needs to be done to keep the town clean and tidy?

Improving Accessibility

1. Do you feel the town centre is open to all?
2. Do the routes within the town centre feel safe, if not why?
3. What are your thoughts in terms of the walking and cycling routes in the centre?
4. What mode of transport do you use and why?
5. What are the barriers to improving accessibility in the town centre?

Next Steps

- Kirklees College to carry out recruiting sessions on the 14th and 15th March with the aim of securing Youth Voice Champions and gather feedback from the students on the progress of the Town Investment Plan.
- Town Board meeting will be taking place on the 17th March, Michelle Illingworth to update the board on the current progress to date around Youth Engagement.

Supporting documents for consideration

[Dewsbury town centre Strategic Development Framework 2018 and Delivery Programme \(kirklees.gov.uk\)](https://www.kirklees.gov.uk/development-and-planning/development-framework/development-framework-2018-and-delivery-programme)

[Dewsbury Town Board | Kirklees Council](https://www.kirklees.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/town-boards/dewsbury-town-board)

[Dewsbury Town Investment Plan \(kirklees.gov.uk\)](https://www.kirklees.gov.uk/development-and-planning/town-investment-plan)

[The Dewsbury Blueprint | Kirklees Council](https://www.kirklees.gov.uk/development-and-planning/blueprint)

[Our Town Dewsbury consultation report \(kirklees.gov.uk\)](https://www.kirklees.gov.uk/development-and-planning/consultation-reports)

