

Contact Officer: Nicola Sylvester

Dewsbury Town Board

Thursday 28th November 2024

Present: Keith Ramsay (Chair)
Sophie Johnson
Councillor Graham Turner
Charlie Dunn
Natalie Liddle
Martin Walsh
Sophie Johnson
Anum Rehman
Peter Mason
Christine Fox

In attendance: Iqbal Mohamad (Virtual)
Fara Butt (Virtual)
Anis Dadu (Virtual)
Sam Heaton (Virtual)
Helen Rose (Virtual)
Palvinder Singh (Virtual)
David Wildman, Kirklees Council
James Blamires, Kirklees Council
Andy Raleigh, Kirklees Council
Helen Jakes, Kirklees Council
Joanne Bartholomew, Kirklees Council
Jaime Nalson, Kirklees Council
Gareth Sidebottom, Kirklees Council
Richard Thorpe, Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government

Observers: Richard Butterfield (Historic England)

Apologies: Chief Supt Jim Griffiths
Paul Burnett

- 1 Membership of Dewsbury Town Board**
Apologies were received on behalf of Chief Superintendent Jim Griffiths and Paul Burnett.

2 Declaration of Interests

No interests were declared.

Forms are to be completed and received prior to the next Board meeting to allow Board Members to participate.

**3 Minutes of Previous Meeting
RESOLVED:**

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 3rd October 2024 be approved as a correct record.

4 Admission of the Public

All items were considered in public.

5 Public Question Time

Written questions from Councillor Paul Moore:

- 1) With the closure of Dewsbury Sports Centre confirmed this month, which I appreciate is not the remit of this board, my question is about the devastating impact this will have on footfall in the town centre.
With just over 20,000 visits per month now gone forever, coupled with Kirklees staff being removed from Empire House how has the Dewsbury Blueprint been amended to reflect this chronic loss of footfall and what is the town board's strategy to try and address/replace this footfall?

Joanne Bartholomew, Director for Development, provided a response on the Dewsbury Blueprint which was developed with footfall in the town centre in mind. Projects such as the Town Park, the Market and the reopening of the Arcade were key to ensuring increased footfall in the town centre. Ms Bartholomew undertook to forward the Cabinet report associated with the Dewsbury Sports Centre to the Board Members and the questioner, as it contained information on the impact of footfall in the area.

The Chair noted that the Board recognised that the Dewsbury Sport Centre was a priority for the community, however, that funding secured by the Town Deal, and any future funding from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government could not be used to fund its re-opening. Funding for the Dewsbury Sports Centre was a matter for the Council to respond to. The focus of Dewsbury Town Board remained on the delivery of committed projects to support regeneration and on a programme of interventions to be brought forward through a long-term plan to support economic growth.

- 2) Since being elected as a Councillor in May 2023 I have seen shops and businesses shutting at an alarming rate, little if any enforcement of street drinkers and large groups of men congregating and intimidating people in the town centre, especially women. People perceive Dewsbury town centre as not being safe, which I think is a fair assessment. Can this board agree to multi agency approach to target visible enforcement on market days, which are Wednesday and Saturday, so we give the public confidence and try and

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protect the only two days where there is some reasonable footfall left in Dewsbury town centre?

The Chair responded to the question by advising that the Board supported multi-agency working and would be seeking revenue funding to help deal with compliance and safety and security in the next financial year.

Question from Christine Cagna:

“Since Dewsbury was, and is still, billed as a Leisure Town, what specific plans are in place to make this a reality as Dewsbury Sports Centre, which was a given in original plans, has now been closed permanently?”

The Chair responded to the question by referring to his earlier response on Dewsbury Sports Centre and advised that the Board would support leisure and health activity in the long term plan strategy.

A supplementary question was asked, which queried how long it would be until plans were put in place to provide Dewsbury residents with leisure services.

The Chair of the Board advised that the Board would not be able to answer the questions and requested that Kirklees Council provide a response. Ms Bartholomew, Service Director, Kirklees Council, advised that officers were working on a wider Dewsbury Leisure offer and undertook to liaise with colleagues tasked with the work, and to return to a future Board meeting with the information.

Question from Gill Young:

“The Board’s own Investment Plan text talks about our town’s ‘assets, opportunities and challenges’ and central Government publications emphasise the need to involve local people in local decisions so it would be interesting to hear how the Town Board reconciles these fine words while failing to respond to local people’s commitment to Dewsbury Leisure Centre, the saving of which would maintain an asset, be the main reason for local people to visit the town and offer opportunities to challenge deprivation. An explanation of the Town Board’s failure so far to commit to its continuation, despite its obvious benefits to other schemes, will be welcome.”

The Chair responded to the question by advising that when funding for the Dewsbury Town Deal was secured, Dewsbury Sports Centre was in operation. The Town Investment Plan was agreed in June 2021, with funding allocated to nine key projects. Dewsbury Town Board does not have the funds to maintain and run the Dewsbury Sports Centre, it does want leisure, entertainment and recreation to be part of a vibrant offer and will work with Kirklees Council to achieve this.

Questions from Bruce Bird:

- 1) “At the October meeting I asked the Chair for a progress report on his commitment in July 2023 to provide information regarding progress on all 9 TIP projects in the town centre for those members of the community who do not use the internet. Regrettably, his reply in writing contained no relevant

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information. It also included a statement that information is available on the hoardings around the Arcade. This is not true. I replied to him with the suggestion that he make a second attempt in order to avoid my having to raise the issue again tonight. I have received no reply. Will the Chair now tell us what he has done to fulfil his 18 month old commitment to provide information on progress on all nine TIP projects in the town centre for those who do not use the internet?"

The Chair responded to the question and advised that during Item 9 of the agenda there would be a full discussion on the matter.

A supplementary question was asked: "Will you make sure that all of your answers are available to the public?"

The Chair advised that he would endeavour to make sure that the Board was as transparent as possible in what is said, and in the answers to any questions.

- 2) "There is every indication that the current definition of the Board's area of responsibility has led to different interpretations. This has led to the Chair giving responses both to Mr Mohamed at the May meeting and Ms Cagna in his last written reply that others find difficult to understand. The geographic area of responsibility is clearly defined by article 1.2 of the Terms of Reference while the phrase 'significant focus on the town centre' is intrinsically vague. This is presumed to reflect the minutes for 28 March that record that '...senior officers strongly recommended that investment was concentrated in the town centre'. While the benefit of focusing on existing projects is self-evident, the 'significant focus' by the Board is a subjective judgement based on an assessment of whether any project is more or less beneficial to existing efforts. To reach that conclusion the Board must necessarily consider the issue in question before reaching a conclusion. Similarly, one of the Board's responsibilities is to advise the council and it will be failing in this responsibility if it does not have sufficient knowledge arising from a competent assessment of issues arising in the town. Will the Chair therefore confirm that:
 - No issue within the area shown in Appendix A of the Terms is or will be excluded for reasons of geography.
 - To avoid any repetition of the current confusion any decision on whether a matter will be taken into consideration by the Board is properly considered by the Board before decisions are made?"

The Chair advised that in Item 7, clarity would be provided on the geography of the boundary of the Town Board and on the process by which projects were considered by the Board in those geographical boundaries.

Questions from Jennifer Devlin:

- 1) "The Director of Overview and Scrutiny having apparently failed to validate the call in of the decision to permanently close Dewsbury Sports Centre without giving any reasons for that decision, will the Chair of Dewsbury Town Board now fulfil his role as set out in the Dewsbury Town Board Terms of

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reference (Roles and Responsibilities) to Act as a Champion for the Town by finding out the reasons for that decision on behalf of the 5,000 signatories of the petition to keep Dewsbury Sports Centre open, the residents who used to make over 20,000 visits a month to DSC, and the residents who are now denied access to sports facilities. Despite the assertions in the report to Cabinet of 5.11.24, there is a serious lack of alternative sports facilities in the town, with school children now missing teaching time travelling to alternative swimming provision, congestion at Spen Valley and Batley Sports and Tennis Centres, and the virtual impossibility of accessing these alternative centres without private transport?”

The Chair responded to the question by referring to his earlier response on Dewsbury Sports Centre and undertook to request a response in writing from Kirklees Council, as it was not within the remit of the Dewsbury Town Board.

- 2) “Also in his role of Champion for the Town of Dewsbury, will the Chair work with Kirklees Council to secure access for a member of the group seeking the reopening of Dewsbury Sports Centre to assess the building and the extent of the RAAC. The report on the presence of RAAC provided to KMC did not indicate the need for closure. Uncertainty about the real extent of RAAC (there is none on the dryside) and the true cost of work to mitigate the situation (which may be considerably less than stated by KMC) needs to be clarified before a building of such fundamental importance to the town is demolished. The reopening of Dewsbury Sports Centre is key to football in the town and therefore to the viability and sustainability of the Board's projects?”

The Chair undertook to request a response in writing from Kirklees Council.

6 Deputations/Petitions

No deputations or petitions were received.

7 Chairs Update

The Chair provided an update on a number of issues, which included updates from Kirklees Council officers.

Clarity on the geographical boundary of the Town Board and whether the Dewsbury Sports Centre is within that geographical boundary.

- David Wildman, Head of Town Centre Regeneration apologised for any previous confusion regarding geographic and funding boundaries. He went on to state the following:
- The geographic boundary for the Town Board was set by Central Government as the Office for National Statistics [ONS Built Up Area](#), this is the area shown in Appendix A of the March 2024 Terms of Reference. In developing the [Town Investment Plan](#) it was agreed that the primary focus of investment activities should be the town centre. In response to the Long-term Plan for Towns guidance, issued by the Government, the Terms of Reference were updated (and issued in March 2024) but the geographic boundary for the Town Board remained unchanged as the ONS Built Up Area.
- However, it was agreed by Board members with advice from Government officials that any future funding should focus on the town centre to ensure

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future investment builds on and aligns with existing regeneration plans and priorities.

- The Sports Centre has always been within the boundary of the geographic area covered by the Town Board. However, the Town Deal funding was allocated to specific schemes (the majority of which are within the town centre to support economic regeneration) through an appraisal and business case process which was approved by Government.
- We await the new prospectus and scope for the long-term plan for Towns but we expect the geographic boundary to remain as is shown within Appendix A of the March 2024 Terms of Reference.

Summary of how the Town Deal projects were identified

- The Chair provided a summary to remind members the process undertaken to identify the Town Deal projects:
- **The Strategic Development Framework 2010** was developed in partnership with Kirklees Council and Yorkshire Forward and included an extensive amount of public engagement.
- **The Strategic Development Framework 2018** was a refresh of the original 2010 Strategic Development Fund and developed and set out a 25-year vision for the town centre. It was supported by a delivery programme that included projects and actions over the next 5 years.
- **Dewsbury Blueprint** was launched in Spring 2020 and outlined a 10-year plan to bring more activity into the centre, and make it more attractive and more accessible.
- **Dewsbury Blueprint Consultation undertaken in 2020 by Kirklees Council** sought to gain an understanding from the public as to how the Blueprint should be shaped, for the benefit of for residents, business and visitors to the town centre.
- **June 2020 - Avison Young appointed** to prepare and develop the Dewsbury Town Investment Plan (TIP), this included a review of the above documents and consultation results.
- **October 2020 – Social Communications** appointed to carry out an inclusive programme of consultation and engagement to support the TIP and inform the long list. The “**Our Town**” 2020 report helped to inform the long list of projects for the TIP.
- **October 2020 – Project selection** process led by **Avison Young** in partnership with Kirklees Council and Dewsbury Town Deal Board. Technical work by council, consultants and board to inform the long list of projects was undertaken using Town Fund eligibility and appraisal criteria (in accordance with HM Treasury Green Book). Option assessment was undertaken to refine the long list to short list for inclusion in the TIP submission.
- **January 2021** - Dewsbury Town Board endorsed the TIP including short list projects.
- **January 2021** - Cabinet approved the TIP paper and agreed additional council match funding.
- **January 2021** - TIP submitted to government to seek £25.58m
- **June 2021** - Confirmation the TIP had been accepted and council awarded £24.8m.

Ability to move funding on Town Deal projects or use Long-term Plan funding for the Dewsbury Sports Centre

- David Wildman, Head of Town Centre Regeneration, advised that the Town Fund grant could be moved between the approved Town Deal projects, subject to a Project Adjustment Request (PAR) being approved by Government, but that money could not be moved from an approved Town Deal project to something new. A PAR should focus on securing the viability of existing projects and ensuring that interventions are deliverable, good value for money and continue to have a strong strategic fit with the original TIP. Funding recipients must provide an updated Benefit-Cost Ratio and confirm they have updated and reappraised the project business case to show that it still represents good value for money.
- The Long-term Plan funding would not provide sufficient funds for the Capital or Revenue requirements associated with reopening and running Dewsbury Sports Centre.
- Richard Thorpe, Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government advised the Board that a cross-government assessment process had taken place in terms of town investment plans; the specific projects put forward determined the actual quantum that Dewsbury was awarded. Any sort of significant changes towards new projects would undermine that assessment process.

Mr Wildman responded to a question from the Deputy Chair regarding funding that was not yet contractually committed and updated the Board that £8-9 million had yet to be contractually committed, with the majority of this being associated with the market project, the urban realm improvement schemes and the Construction Skills Village which are all in the latter stages of development.

Risk management and budget contingency for the Town Deal programme

- Mr Wildman updated on the following:
- Council Officers maintained a risk register for all projects within the Town Deal to capture risks and opportunities.
- Risks were reviewed at a programme level; the Project Management Office reported and processed this monthly.
- Contingency budget was included into each individual project
- Programme level contingency – Uncommitted funding from schemes planned would be held to deal with emerging risks and issues.

Clarity on the Procurement process for the Arcade

- The Chair provided the following update:
- William Birch & Sons Ltd won the tender for the Dewsbury Arcades scheme with a £5,629,259.68 value of contract. The contract was awarded on 28 February 2024, with a formal start date of 5th April 2024. The appointment followed the public sector procurement process and used a recognised, appropriate framework to procure from.
- Early contractor liaison took place to understand the interest in the scheme. All 12 prospective Tenderers on the Yorbuild 3 Lot 1 Over £4m - £10m framework were invited to an open day at the Dewsbury Arcade site and were provided with a comprehensive information pack. Following

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engagement with contractors the terms of contract were amended, and the tender was re-issued via the Yorbuild Framework to the same operators.

- There was a single bid in response to the exercise and to ensure value for money and due diligence around costings was evaluated against the published award criteria and scored accordingly. Pricing was benchmarked against the initial tender estimates. It was noted that the limited interest in the contract was likely to be due to the specialist nature of the restoration work on a listed building in a town centre setting.
- William Birch & Sons Ltd had shown interest in the scheme throughout the procurement process and were proven specialists in Historic building restoration. The contract overheads and profit were in line with industry standards of between 3% and 5%.

Update on the tenant strategy for the Arcade

- The Chair provided the following update using information provided by Chris Hill, Dewsbury Arcade Project Manager:
- Marketing the Arcade to prospective tenants was underway, a [Tenant Brochure](#) had been produced and the [Arcade website](#) had been updated with details of the available units and how to register interest.
- Two companies had been procured to help seek tenants on a commission basis from November 2024.
- Toolbox Marketing had been procured to produce a tenant campaign around 'win a free shop for a year'. The target of this work would be specific sectors like specialist foods.
- A Social Media Content Producer was due to start work prior to Christmas, producing content to promote the Arcade.
- 18 businesses had enquired into taking a lease this year. Firm interest had been received from 7 businesses.
- Work continued on delivering the Heritage Fund activity plan. The Arcade group had good links with Kirklees College and community groups. A Pop-up space had been set up in the Princess of Wales which was now open Mondays and Fridays 10am to 2pm.

RESOLVED:

That the Chair's update be noted

8 Board Member Update

RESOLVED:

There were no updates regarding Dewsbury Town Board Members.

9 Communication Update

Helen Jakes, Senior Communications Officer, provided an update regarding visible communications in the Town Centre. The hoardings around the Arcade gave detailed information about the Arcade project and further information on the plans for Dewsbury Town Centre. Signage referencing the Board was visible from the Ring Road on the side of Field House. The issue of Dewsbury being multi-lingual

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had been addressed through translators available at in-person engagement events, and options for written communications in multiple languages were being considered. Anum Rehman agreed to meet with Helen Jakes to discuss translation of communication into languages commonly spoken in the community.

Helen Rose, Vice Principal of Kirklees College, advised the Board that a Town Board Working Group had met to provide a focus on communications. Ms Rose advised that a final report would be received from Counter Context and the website was making progress. The key message from the working group was that Board Members engaging with and sharing content on social media about the projects would be beneficial.

Ms Jakes informed the Board that there was the opportunity to increase physical communication activity in the town centre and provided a number of options with associated costs. The Board agreed to allocate a budget of up to £12,500, and asked that a proposal from the Town Board Working Group be provided by the 6th February.

Ms Jakes noted that communications from December 2024 to March 2025 would include the following:

- The relocation of the bandstand to Crow Nest park.
- The visit from Kirklees College's new skills village, 'Kirklees Build', to the arcade.
- The installation of planter signage.
- A construction update on the Dewsbury Arcade, highlighting the local business working on the glass roof.
- Details of the Dewsbury Market decant, how this will work within the town centre and for traders.
- Supporting the Arcade Group in seeking new traders.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the Communication Update be noted.
- 2) That £12,500 be allocated to the Town Board Working Group in relation to communications around the town centre and to report back to the Board.

10 Long Term Plan Update

The Chair advised the Board that the funding for the Long-Term Plan was originally planned to be available from April 2025, this had now been delayed to April 2026.

Mr Wildman provided an update and explained that the Town Board programme may be renamed and would be reformed, with a new prospectus expected in January 2025 which would include a revised set of interventions, to reflect Labour's missions and provide more flexibility. It was expected that the ten-year profile and the amount of funding would remain the same.

A small amount of additional programme management capacity funding (£200,000) was expected for 2025/2026 to help the Board rescope additional engagement as required, undertake preparation work, and potentially look at other measures. The

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Chair advised that discussions were ongoing on how this money could be spent to support the priorities from recent engagement, which would be reported back to the Board. In discussion there was the suggestion that some of this capacity funding may be used to support existing events and safety concerns in the town centre.

James Blamires, Projects Officer, Town Centre Regeneration Team gave an update on recent additional engagement carried out with young people in Dewsbury, which had been commissioned by the Board following a review of responses to previous engagement. This included a targeted social media campaigns by Counter Context, and in-person engagement events. Over 100 young people, aged 10 to late twenties had been consulted, in a range of educational settings, to gather their views. It was found that young people felt passionately about the town centre and wanted to make positive change

In summing up, James Blamires concluded that the priorities of young people were consistent with the wider engagement sessions and aligned with the priorities from previous engagement activities. There were also some new ideas from young people in terms of what they wanted for the future, such as affordable housing, safety & security improvements and supporting homeless people in the town centre more.

During discussion the Board commented on the need for managing the messaging around the pause in funding, and the need to target the capacity funding in ways which would be visible and which responded directly to issues raised during the engagement. It was suggested that an update on disused buildings and the perception of safety in the town centre, be brought to the next meeting.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the Long-Term Plan update be noted.
- 2) That an update on opportunities associated Dewsbury's disused buildings and multi-disciplinary enforcement be presented at the next Board meeting.

11 Project Update

The Chair referred to the nine project schemes that had been part of the Town Deal, and invited Board Members for comment on each project.

Ms Rose, Kirklees College, invited Board Members to visit the construction skills village to see their progress. The dates of the invitation were 16th December or 15th January.

During questions and answers, it was stated that:

- The outcome of the planning application for the Market was due in the next few weeks.
- Signage detailing plans for the Market would be considered, with options given at the next meeting by the Communications Team.
- A mop-up session was planned for Members who were unavailable to attend the Board member market workshop. Dates would be emailed to all Board Members.

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Andy Raleigh, Kirklees Town Centre Programme Manager, advised the Board that the Experimental Traffic Regulation Order (ETRO) on the Corporation Street junction would now be in place before Christmas and joint working between Kirklees Build and the Arcade was planned in December, with students experiencing the live building project.

The Board noted that optioneering on 27, Market Place, the disused building next to the Arcade, had been completed. The next step was to understand whether the funding could be used for the building revival and to discuss options with Richard Thorpe and his team. This would then be shared with the Board to consider options to acquire the building to improve the offer of the Arcade and mitigate the risk of having a deteriorating building next to it. The Board agreed that the work on this should continue.

RESOLVED:

That the Project Update be noted.

12 AOB RESOLVED –

That there were no other business items.

13 Date of Next Meeting 6th February 2025 Location: Dewsbury Town Hall