

Contact Officer: Nicola Sylvester

Dewsbury Town Board

Thursday 6th February 2025

Present: Keith Ramsay (Chair)
Iqbal Mohamed (MP)
Councillor Graham Turner
Chief Supt Jim Griffiths
Paul Burnett
Fara Butt
Charlie Dunn
Martin Walsh
Sophie Johnson
Anum Rehman
Peter Mason
Helen Rose
Christine Fox
Iqbal Mohamed
Rosalind Arden
Sam Heaton (Virtual)
Palvinder Singh (Virtual)

In attendance: Joanne Bartholomew, Kirklees Council
David Wildman, Kirklees Council
Thomas Fish, Kirklees Council
James Blamires, Kirklees Council
Andy Raleigh, Kirklees Council
Helen Jakes, Kirklees Council
Joanne Tansley, Kirklees Council
Martin Wood, Kirklees Council
Elisa Fielding, Kirklees Council
Michelle Illingworth, Kirklees Council

Apologies: Anis Dadu
Sue Baker

- 1 Membership of Dewsbury Town Board**
Apologies were received on behalf of Sue Baker. Rosalind Arden substituted on behalf of Anis Dadu.

2 Declaration of Interests

No interests were declared.

**3 Minutes of Previous Meeting
RESOLVED –**

That the minutes of the meeting held on 28th November 2024 be approved as a correct record.

4 Admission of the Public

All items were considered in public.

5 Public Question Time

Question from Gill Young:

- 1) I have raised before my personally perceived impact of the closing of the Leisure Centre on the level of footfall in the town. With more empty retail and business units now than at the start of the town improvement plan, could we have the base footfall data for 2021/22, at the start of the plan when the Leisure Centre was open, the regular 6 monthly assessments of progress against this base, with a review of the current measured position of the town's footfall after the interventions already committed and made under our town investment plan.

RESOLVED –

A response was provided by the Chair.

6 Deputations/Petitions

No deputations or petitions were received.

7 Chairs Update

The Chair provided an update on the following:

- A Strategy Day for Board Members to attend was being planned for March.
- Martin Wood, Head of Public Protection, was present to observe issues of safety and security in the centre of Dewsbury.
- A recent visit had been undertaken by Board Members to the Construction Skills Village, who commented on the positivity, commitment and enthusiasm of course tutors. Board Members had observed that the modular build was effective and that there had not been an overspend. It was noted that, given more resources, there could be opportunity to expand the project, to meet local need for the training provided.
- A visit for Board Members was to be arranged, to visit the Arcade which was nearing completion. The Board acknowledged that this was one of the first projects delivered by the Town Board.

RESOLVED –

That the Chair's Update be noted.

8 Board Member Update

The Board was advised that Councillor Cathy Scott had resigned from Dewsbury Town Board at the end of 2024. The Chair thanked Councillor Cathy Scott for the various roles she had undertaken, and the support she had given to the Board, and wished her well in her future endeavours. A replacement for Councillor Scott would be nominated by the Council and announced at the next Board meeting.

During discussion the Board considered comments made by Iqbal Mohamed (MP) as below:

- There were suggestions from the community that the impact of the closure of the Dewsbury Sports Centre should be considered in the Long-Term Plan.
- Mr Mohamed supported a proposal put forward by his constituents, that up to 30% of the Town Investment Plan funding could be repurposed for projects and activities which could include Dewsbury Sports Centre.
- Mr Mohamed had written to the Secretary of State for Culture Media and Sport, The Chancellor, and the Prime Minister, to ask for the funds to reopen Dewsbury Sports Centre.
- If funding was not provided by Central Government, Dewsbury Town Board should consider at least funding £400,000 capital costs to reopen the dry side, and that the £1.13 million revenue costs may potentially be covered by membership fees and ad hoc user fees, depending on how those costs were calculated.
- Mr Mohamed advised that he may submit a proposal or motion to the Board to explore the funding around Dewsbury Sports Centre further.

It was agreed that Joanne Bartholemew, Kirklees Council, would provide the Board with a report outlining the reasons why Town Board funding could not be allocated to the reopening of Dewsbury Sports Centre, which would be shared with Board Members and the public. The Board was advised that Richard Thorpe from the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities had provided an update on how the funding could be allocated at the November meeting, and that the Kirklees Council Cabinet decision and Cabinet papers for Dewsbury Sports Centre were available on the Kirklees Council website and included details of all costs involved in reopening the dry side. The Board noted that the decision to close the Sports Centre had been taken by Kirklees Council, and that there was no capacity within the forthcoming budget to provide revenue or capital costs required for a re-opening. The Chair suggested that the matter could be discussed at the strategy meeting in March and Members of the Board were offered a Teams meeting with officers to understand the technicalities of the Dewsbury Sports Centre building.

The Board noted that the closure of Dewsbury Sports Centre could impact footfall in the Town Centre and agreed that measures to bring people into Dewsbury for leisure activity should be a topic for discussion at the strategy meeting, which was to include the possibility of repurposing existing buildings.

RESOLVED –

That the Board Member Update be noted.

9 Communication Update

The Board received an update from the Communications Working Group as below:

- Counter Context had been working on a schedule of social media posts for publication on a variety of social media platforms. Board Members were asked to share these posts on their social media.
- The Board were asked for feedback on what information they would like to see shared on social media, and a monthly request would be sent by Counter Context to prompt this feedback.
- James Blamires, Project Officer, had provided text for the frequently asked questions (FAQs) and facts page for the Dewsbury Town Board website, which had been reviewed by the working group.
- The working group had met with officers to review a number of options on how to spend the budget allocated at the last meeting of the Board, including how to best reach residents of Dewsbury and update them on the work of the Dewsbury Town Board.
- The working group's preferred options were advertisements on buses and bus stops, window vinyls, billboards and local radio, to reach as wide an audience as possible.
- Further costings on these options were to be provided at the next meeting of the working group.
- One third of the £12,500 budget for communications activity would be saved for later in the year.
- Translation costs of communications into community languages had been considered, as well as how to reach residents who did not access digital technology. These communication activities were being prioritised.

During discussion the Board noted that information regarding the Board's position on the Dewsbury Sports Centre would be provided on the Dewsbury Town Board website, and that the website would clarify how the public could ask further questions and engage with the work of Dewsbury Town Board. It was noted that there was the potential to use of WhatsApp as a channel of communication, however it was deemed to be unsuitable due to issues of data protection. The Communications Team invited further ideas from the Board on how to reach out to different groups within the community.

RESOLVED –

That the Communication Update be noted.

10 Long Term Plan Update

The Board received an update on the Long-Term Plan by David Wildman, Strategic Partnership Lead, which included the following key information:

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The updated guidance from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government had not yet been published but was expected to be received by the end of the financial year. The guidance was expected to set out details of the following:

- The name of the plan, as it was unlikely to remain as the Long-Term Plan
- Funding, including values, timescale and capacity funding for 2025/26
- Priorities and Investment themes
- Requirements of the submission and content
- Timescales for submission

The Board were reminded of the five key areas identified for the Long-Term Plan during the engagement phase of 2023/24, which were:

- Bringing empty buildings and derelict spaces back into use including new homes
- Improving safety & security to tackle current issues and enable longer-term prevention
- Making the town more attractive
- Supporting businesses
- Providing more things to do including events, cultural programmes and sports for younger people

The Board were advised that £200,000 capacity funding was expected to be available for 2024/25, which would be allocated by Government to prepare for the delivery of capital and revenue interventions in 2025/26.

The Board recognised that more could be done with the funding. A number of Board Members and Council officers who worked in Dewsbury had completed a survey to identify priorities for this funding, and commonality had been found in the results of the two groups. Four of the top five priorities in both groups were:

- A Multi-disciplinary Safety and Security team
- Events
- Housing and Economic Action Plan
- Meanwhile-use Strategy

It was proposed that a plan for the capacity funding would be drawn up, for discussion at the next meeting.

RESOLVED –

That the Long-Term Plan Update be noted.

11 Project Update

Thomas Fish, Acting Head of Housing Growth at Kirklees Council, provided the Board with a presentation on the Dewsbury Living Town (Daisy Hill development).

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This included a retrospective look at the project, and the future of housing in and around Dewsbury Town Centre.

The presentation covered the following key points:

- The Dewsbury Blueprint outlined the ambition for greater numbers of people living in Dewsbury Town Centre to promote an associated increase in footfall and investment.
- The Daisy Hill Neighbourhood Project was one of nine projects funded by the Dewsbury Town Investment plan, to provide first steps towards creating 200 quality homes, attracting occupiers with disposable incomes to help support the town centre economy.
- A map of the Daisy Hill Neighbourhood showed the buildings owned and in the process of being acquired by Kirklees Council. It was a long-term strategy due to the process of acquiring a critical mass of properties.
- Fieldhouse Station apartments, opposite the Station, had now been redeveloped and was a catalyst project, setting a precedent in terms of high-quality apartments.
- Neil Jordan House was the next building to be sold as a residential development.
- Developers had indicated that Daisy Hill Neighbourhood was not a big enough site for investment.
- The Local Plan update provided further opportunities for wider town centre living opportunities.
- Riverside Strategic Housing Site was a larger scale investment opportunity, already in the Local Plan as a new community of 4,000 homes. south of Thornhill Lees / Ravensthorpe.
- A new Ravensthorpe train station was being built on the site as part of Trans-Pennine Route upgrade.
- A funding bid of £53 million to Homes England Brownfield Infrastructure Land Fund had been submitted, for the Riverside site, to fill the funding gap and create the infrastructure to open up the site.
- It was hoped that the site would go to market to secure a master developer, and an update on this to be brought to the Board in July.

Timescales for next steps were outlined:

During discussion the Board noted that the Council was looking for land for industrial or housing development to include in the Local Plan.

The Board raised the issue of communication about the long-term plans with owners of properties in the town centre so that they were fully informed. The Board was advised that this would part of the overall communications by Dewsbury Town Board as outlined in the Communications Update.

The Board questioned the amount of social and affordable housing that would be made available in the new developments and were advised that the baseline would be to meet the Local Plan targets for at least 20% affordable housing, and the planning process would support this.

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In response to a question about the potential strain on infrastructure caused by extra homes, especially traffic on Huddersfield Road, the Board were advised that when the site was allocated for housing in 2019, evidence that had informed the Local Plan was used to assess the traffic impact across the whole district. West Yorkshire Combined Authority (WYCA) and Homes England funding had since been used to update that evidence. A requirement for significant investment in transport was expected, and this was being considered during conversations with WYCA about future strategic transport investment.

The Board discussed concerns over the Daisy Hill Neighbourhood whilst the process of building acquisition took place in terms of public health and safety. It was agreed that this would be a topic for discussion at the Strategy Day in March.

RESOLVED –

That the Project Update be noted.

12 AOB

The Board was advised that the Old Police Station in Dewsbury Town Centre would become vacant by the end of the year and would be put on the market. A discussion took place regarding ways in which this could create an opportunity for the key outcomes that the Town Board wanted to deliver. The Board noted the suggestion that a case be made around how differing decisions on the future building's use would impact on the outcomes for Dewsbury's economy and residents.

The Board discussed empty buildings in the Town Centre, particularly the Old Post Office, and it was suggested a position statement be provided on the ability of the Council to take action on derelict buildings. The Chair suggested that funding for enforcement could be considered by the Board.

RESOLVED –

That Any Other Business items be noted.

13 Date of Next Meeting

1st May 2025

Location: Dewsbury Town Hall