Minutes

DATE 17th April 2020

MEETING **OLDHAM TOWN DEAL BOARD MEETING**

VENUE Virtual meeting held over Microsoft Teams TIME 13.30

**PRESENT**

**APOLOGIES**

Barrett, Suzanne Beckett, Jessica Bloor, Jon

Courtie, Pete DaSilva, Anna

Fielding, Councillor Sean Flanagan, Mike

Frith, Roger

Harris, Liam Hewitt, Sara Holbrook, Peter Hunt, Andrew

Jones, Suzanne

Khan, Nawaz Lambert, Matthew Lewis, Chris Lister, Graham Lockwood, Helen Lockwood, Stuart McMahon, MP Jim Moore, Graeme

Oliver-Lawlor, Rosina Patterson, John Penn, Jennifer Rahim, Fazal

Tolan, James Wildman, Susan Wilkins, Dr. Carolyn

Windsor-Welsh, Liz Yousaf, Adnan

Abrahams, MP Debbie Barton, Emma Cumberland, Nick Dawson, Beverley

Dryden-Stuart, Elizabeth Eastwood, Richard Firth, Nicola

Regeneration Officer, Oldham Council Communications Manager, Oldham Council

Head of Lifelong Learning, Employment and Skills, Oldham Council

Relationship Manager, Arts Council England Northern Roots Project Director, Oldham Council Leader, Oldham Council

Spindles Town Square Shopping Centre Manager, Kennedy Wilson *(Vice-Chair)*

Head of Regeneration and Development, Oldham Council

Member, Oldham Youth Council

Markets and Town Centre Manager, Oldham Council Chief Executive, Social Enterprise UK *(Chair)*

Green Oldham Policy and Delivery Manager, Oldham Council

Assistant Director, Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy

Regeneration Team Leader, Oldham Council Senior Consultant, Mott MacDonald

Lead Youth Worker, Oldham Council

Arts and Cultural Adviser, Artbuilding Projects Deputy Chief Executive, Oldham Council Chief Executive, Oldham Community Leisure MP for Oldham West and Royton

Planning Officer, Oldham Council

Office Manager, Office of Angela Rayner MP Chief Clinical Officer, NHS Oldham CCG Regeneration Officer, Oldham Council Project Coordinator, Oldham Interfaith Forum

Principal Regeneration Officer, Oldham Council Interim Chief Executive, Oldham Coliseum Theatre Chief Executive, Oldham Council and Accountable Officer, NHS Oldham CCG

Chief Executive, Action Together

Real Estate Manager, The Cross Group

MP for Oldham East and Saddleworth Director of Economy, Oldham Council Senior Specialist (Housing), Homes England

Senior Manager (Capital and Projects), Arts Council England

Planning Team Leader, Oldham Council Equity Partner, Pearson Solicitors

Chief Officer, Northern Care Alliance (Royal Oldham Hospital)

Francis, Alun Lightfoot, Andrew

Lovat, Bill Nokes, Simon

Rayner, MP Angela Riley, Michelle Tarbuck, Stuart

Wallis, Andrew

Principal and Chief Executive, Oldham College Deputy Chief Executive, Greater Manchester Combined Authority

Regional Director, The Regenda Group

Executive Director, Greater Manchester Combined Authority

MP for Ashton-under-Lyne Owner, Cob and Coal Tap

Interim Head of Communications and Research, Oldham Council

Project Principal, Mott MacDonald

ITEM

# Welcome, introductions and apologies (Peter Holbrook)

* 1. Peter Holbrook opened the meeting and gave the apologies. He congratulated Angela Rayner MP and Jim McMahon MP on their respective appointments as Deputy Leader of the Labour Party and Shadow Secretary of State for Transport since the last meeting.

# Notice of urgent business to be accepted onto the agenda (Peter Holbrook)

* 1. None.

# Declarations of interest (Peter Holbrook)

* 1. None.

# Minutes of the previous meeting (Peter Holbrook)

* 1. The minutes of the meeting held on 28th February 2020 were agreed as a true record of the discussion and approved for publication on the website of Oldham Council (‘the Council’), [www.oldham.gov.uk.](http://www.oldham.gov.uk/)

# Towns Fund pilot area invitation (Suzanne Jones)

* 1. In her role as a civil servant, Suzanne Jones is supporting the distribution of business grants during the COVID-19 pandemic by the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) and the delivery of the Towns Fund by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG).
  2. Via the Council, the Oldham Town Deal Board (‘the Board’) has received an invitation for Oldham to become a pilot area for the Towns Fund. If Oldham becomes a pilot area, it will be the first location in Greater Manchester (GM) and one of the first locations in the country to have its bid for £25m fast-tracked by the Government. The Board will need to prepare a Town Investment Plan (TIP) by a new deadline (provisionally the end of May 2020), agree Heads of Terms by the end of July 2020,

and work up a full business case for each project in the TIP by July 2021. The Government will base the budget envelope upon the TIP and expect all capital awarded to be contractually committed by March 2026.

* 1. Unlike the Towns Fund, the local bid to the competitive Future High Streets Fund (FHSF) must be based upon an expression of interest for funding which was submitted by the Council in March 2019. The three projects put forward were a contemporary food hall, transport and public realm improvements, and a hub for creative and digital industries. In contrast, the TIP could yet include alternatives or additions to the four capital projects put forward by the Council at the Government’s request (Grade A office accommodation, a flexible performance space, the Northern Roots urban farm and eco-park, and a district heat network).
  2. Jim McMahon MP asked if the Board would be able to revise the TIP after its approval, for example if the pandemic generated new priorities or rendered some or all of the original projects unviable. Suzanne Jones responded that, in the absence of official guidance and in the spirit of flexibility, the Board would probably be able to submit a written proposal for the Government’s consideration. Jim McMahon MP added that he would write to the Secretary of State to ask if the Government intends to assess the medium- to long-term impacts of the pandemic on town centres. This stems from concerns that anchor retailers could close permanently, leading to a drop in footfall and a need to repurpose shopping centres at a significant cost.

# Town Investment Plan (TIP) template (Suzanne Jones)

* 1. Suzanne Jones and Roger Frith will be amongst those discussing the Towns Fund at a regular meeting of the GM Combined Authority (GMCA) on 20th April. They will use the meeting to determine the extent to which the TIP should respond to the impacts of the pandemic on Oldham’s economy, and to confirm the TIP submission deadline for pilot areas.
  2. The Board is advised to base the TIP on the Treasury’s Green Book and to learn from the draft business case for the FHSF which received positive feedback from the Government. The Government is appointing a management consultancy to provide further capacity support to Boards.

# Community engagement activity (Liz Windsor-Welsh)

* 1. Action Together supports social action and the voluntary, community, social, faith and enterprise sectors in Oldham, Rochdale and Tameside. It is a charity with experience of leading and responding to consultations.
  2. Although Action Together is committed to working in partnership with the Board to engage the local community about the Towns Fund, it has paused all work not relating to the pandemic until at least the start of July, meaning that the bulk of its support for the Board will come later in the year. In the meantime, the charity encourages the Board to refer to the engagement spectrum in order to determine its capacity and appetite for community engagement. The spectrum is not hierarchical and effort must always be proportionate in terms of resources.
  3. The Board should be open and realistic about what it can and cannot deliver in terms of community engagement. It must ultimately decide if the public should influence which projects go into the TIP or, alternatively, inform the design/specification of projects selected for the TIP by the Board. Either way, the Board must communicate to the public that the Towns Fund exists to support transformational capital projects that relate to the GM Local Industrial Strategy and satisfy Government objectives and local priorities.
  4. Online engagement tools should be used in conjunction with other methods because digital exclusion remains a problem despite the efforts of charities to issue equipment to hard-to-reach groups and individuals.
  5. Carolyn Wilkins suggested a phased approach to engagement, perhaps starting with digital activities for students whose schools/colleges are closed during lockdown. Stuart Lockwood added that the Board should review project sponsors’ existing engagement plans to ensure consistency of approach across all projects entered into the TIP.

# Northern Roots urban farm and eco-park (Anna DaSilva)

* 1. Northern Roots will deliver lasting benefits for Oldham’s people and places by transforming 160 acres of land at Snipe Clough, near to Alexandra Park. Anna DaSilva has joined the project team from the RHS.
  2. The proposal is to work towards the Northern Roots charity taking a long lease on the land which can be used to leverage charitable investment. Business modelling is underway to determine the best mix of uses of the site, in the context of green belt sensitivities and opportunities such as irrigation, sustainable drainage systems (SuDS), forestry and green energy. The University of Salford and others are exploring funding options and driving innovation. The ultimate goal is for licensed cooperatives, social enterprises and others to manage the ecosystem and implement the masterplan. Before lockdown there had been extensive community engagement through a dedicated communications platform and family activities including mountain bike rides and forest schools. A group of volunteers had also been formed.
  3. Known supporters of, and potential funders for, Northern Roots include the National Lottery Heritage Fund and Esmée Fairbairn Foundation. The project is putting Oldham at the heart of a national policy debate involving the Government and The Parks Alliance, stemming in part from reports of underinvestment in green spaces during austerity. Northern Roots is broad in scope, representing a unique opportunity for innovation in the fields of climate change mitigation and carbon banking. Subject to the lockdown restrictions being eased, Northern Roots will be showcased at the RHS Hampton Court Palace Garden Festival later this year.
  4. John Patterson commented that he has worked with the Fitton Hill community for the past decade and knows there is much enthusiasm for the project locally. He believes that Northern Roots has the potential to upskill residents, address health issues, and capitalise on the predictable resurgence of people heading outdoors post-lockdown. He added that,

as people are needed on the site as soon as possible, COVID-19 testing for local residents should be prioritised if possible.

* 1. A Towns Fund contribution of around £7m could fund enabling infrastructure and work; construction of a visitor centre; creation of a market garden; and creation of eco-park facilities.

# Flexible performance space (Graham Lister and Susan Wildman)

* 1. Graham Lister has been engaged by the Council and Arts Council England (ACE) to progress plans for a flexible, sustainable performance space that is loved by all of Oldham’s communities. The new space must be able to accommodate different art forms and celebrate Oldham’s heritage whilst looking to the future.
  2. A number of locations for the space are being explored. In particular, architects have been looking at the option of a 400-seat auditorium with catering facilities that could sit between the former Post Office and Friends’ Meeting Room on Greaves Street, opposite the site being redeveloped as Oldham Museum and Archives (OMA). Repurposing existing buildings and ventilating the auditorium naturally would minimise energy use, whilst retaining the walls of the former Post Office would ensure a natural sound barrier between the auditorium and passing trams. The Towns Fund could contribute £8m towards the overall cost.
  3. The pandemic could have a major impact upon the direction of travel with the performance space because whilst community cohesion and interaction have become more important, many arts organisations have moved their offers online in order to survive.
  4. Susan Wildman explained that the Coliseum has been in Oldham for 135 years and is closed temporarily because of the pandemic. Whilst it has a large auditorium with 523 seats, the building is outdated and largely inaccessible by modern standards. Unlike most theatres, the Coliseum makes its own productions to complement the touring plays and one-night shows in its programme. It also has a strong education arm. The Coliseum is developing an artistic vision that reflects contemporary Oldham whilst appreciating the town’s rich heritage, hence its support for the plans to repurpose the buildings on Greaves Street. There are concerns that theatres could be amongst the last places to reopen following lockdown, with serious financial implications for the Coliseum.
  5. Fazal Rahim encouraged the Coliseum to incorporate the history of Oldham’s ethnic groups during the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s into its vision. Pete Courtie called for the project to support the skills agendas, talent retention ambitions and local creative economies of Oldham and GM from the perspective of ACE. Graham Lister confirmed that there is ongoing engagement with the creative community. Susan Wildman added that the Coliseum and Council are working together to enhance the Cultural Quarter, for example by exploring shared job descriptions to make longer opening hours across venues a reality.

# Town centre district heat network (Andrew Hunt)

* 1. The proposed heat network will draw heat from flooded coal mines beneath Oldham town centre, within which water stands at a constant temperature of around 10oC. Heat will be extracted, concentrated and upgraded, and put into a heat network.
  2. The project is linked to the climate change agenda and the Council’s Green New Deal Strategy and ambitions for the borough to be carbon neutral by 2030. It represents the Council’s most ambitious environmental project to date, aimed at tackling sustainability issues and growing green economy jobs and businesses.
  3. The benefits of heat networks include buildings having individual heat exchangers instead of individual boilers, and energy costs being fixed. Reliable and affordable heat is likely to be in even greater demand following the pandemic.
  4. Although the industry is relatively new to the UK, St. Mary’s has its own network and the network in Nottingham supplies heat to 4,500 homes. The proposed network is thought to be capable of heating large buildings such as Oldham Leisure Centre. A grant from BEIS is funding a feasibility study to inform the business case for the whole project, which will cost

£10-15m.

* 1. A total of £2m is required from the Towns Fund for a test borehole site. Test drilling sites are not large or intrusive but building owners and occupants and the wider public should be engaged from the outset to avoid sites being mistaken for fracking infrastructure. The borehole is the risk element of the project as, until that is functioning, the viability of the network as assumed by the Coal Authority cannot be confirmed. The overall project is considered low risk because it will generate significant interest from investment companies and the Council owns many of the buildings within the town centre.

# Recommendations and next steps (Peter Holbrook)

* 1. The Board agreed three recommendations proposed by Peter Holbrook:
     1. Accept the invitation for Oldham to become a pilot area for the Towns Fund, on the basis that the lead local authority and partners will have capacity to deliver resultant projects within the Government’s timescales;
     2. Endorse the flexible performance space, Northern Roots urban farm and eco-park, town centre heat district network and Grade A office accommodation being entered into the TIP, on the understanding that other projects which satisfy the Towns Fund objectives and local priorities can be explored as alternatives/additions between now and the TIP submission deadline (provisionally the end of May 2020); and
     3. Establish a community engagement sub-group chaired by Action Together, the first task of which will be to obtain public feedback on the four projects proposed for the TIP in time for the next meeting of the Board.
  2. Roger Frith confirmed that the Council will use the Towns Fund revenue grant to resource the further development of the four project ideas which are already at an advanced stage. The same grant will be used to evaluate the viability of other project ideas put forward between now and the TIP submission deadline.
  3. Roger Frith asked for the new sub-group chaired by Action Together to review and assess the community engagement plans for the four capital projects to ensure consistency and quality of approach, as per Stuart Lockwood’s earlier suggestion.
  4. Carolyn Wilkins and Helen Lockwood called for the Towns Fund bid to be presented to the public and the Government in the wider context of the Council’s £306m Creating a Better Place investment strategy and regeneration ambitions, and the recovery from the pandemic.
  5. Stuart Lockwood stated that he approved the inclusion of the four capital projects in the TIP at that time, but added that he would need to review the business cases, risk/benefit analyses and delivery timetables of the projects before offering formal support for their progression.

# AOB (Peter Holbrook)

* 1. Roger Frith confirmed that Mott MacDonald will share drafts of the TIP and project-specific business cases with the Board at regular intervals.

# Close of meeting (Peter Holbrook)

* 1. Peter Holbrook thanked the speakers for their presentations and the Board members for their attendance. The meeting closed at 15.40.

**Next meeting:** 13.30 on Friday, 22nd May 2020 (details to follow).