

Minutes of Bexhill Town Board

Meeting of 07 June 2024

Venue: The Studio, De La Warr Pavilion, Bexhill-on-Sea

Meeting Attendance

Board Member	Attendance	Attendance comment
Abi Newbury, FCA (Chair)	Y	N/A
Dr Binodh Bhaskaran (BB)	Y left at 3.30pm	N/A
Dr Mandy Curtis (MC)	Y	N/A
Eleanore Gordon (EG)	Y	N/A
Cllr Ian Hollidge (IH)	Y	N/A
Ollie Jeffs (OJ)	Y	N/A
Howard Martin (HM)	Y	N/A
Cllr Doug Oliver (DO)	Y	N/A
Kim Richards (KR)	N	Apologies due to sickness
Cllr Paul Wilson (PW)	Y	N/A
Katy Bourne, OBE (KB)	Y	N/A
Stewart Drew (SD)	N	Apologies due to prior commitment

Secretariat/Governance

Anne Rathbone – Levelling Up Partnership Manager (RDC). For LTPT Partnership and Town Board. (AR)

Joe Powell, Head of Service – Housing and Regeneration (RDC). For LTPT Governance and Accountable Body function. (JP)

Observers/guests:

None

Item 1: Chair's welcome and introductions

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting. There is a lot of work to be done in a very short timescale. The Town Board needs to stay on track to deliver to the DLUHC timescale. The Chair reiterated the aims of the meeting today, these being:

- to give the Secretariat a clear steer on how the Board want the decision making process to work so this is fair and transparent
- to get the capacity costs for the Board secretariat and accountable body costs approved
- to get an interim update on the quantitative data evidence base
- to move onto exploring our own decisions and vision

Minutes of the last meeting

These were sent out to Board Members for comments and all comments were addressed. They have been sent out to Board Members and uploaded to the Town Board website and should be taken as approved.

HM: apologised for late comment and asked for the term 'resources' in the DLUHC presentation to be changed to 'revenue' and for the term revenue to be used consistently from now on. This was agreed and has been actioned.

HM: p5 of the minutes (Item 6) his comment should be added to, to read 'there should be co-operation but not sharing of finances'. This was agreed and has been actioned.

Going forward, minutes will be treated as approved if comments are not received by Board Members within one week of them being sent out in draft.

2. Declaration of interests for Board Members and Officers

The Chair made the following statement:

In doing Town Board business, it is essential that we follow strict procedures in declaring our interests. Members are reminded of the need to declare any interests immediately prior to the commencement of the agenda item in question. Please could you bear this in mind as we go through the agenda today. Please also remember you are abiding by the Nolan Principles which I intend to ensure the Board stand by in all its business.

Declarations of interest that were given were as follows:

MC confirmed that she sat on Hastings Town Board as well as Bexhill Town Board.

KB confirmed that as PCC she sat on Hastings, Bexhill and Eastbourne Town Boards.

Dr Binodh confirmed that his practice was Little Common surgery.

AR confirmed that she would be out of the meeting for agenda items 3a. and 4.

The Chair asked AR to confirm the progress of the Declaration of Interests register. AR confirmed that most Town Board members had made their declaration of interests. An action was to follow up those outstanding and report back to next meeting.

3. Action Log

Most of the actions are completed or on schedule

Those requiring attention are:

- Young people's engagement to be extended to primary schools
- Engagement through health venues is a current gap
- Detailed policy for Register of Interest in progress but requires completion
- AR to email Town Board members to ensure all have given a Declaration of Interests

Also noted:

An action was to develop a flyer. It was noted that, instead the Chair filmed a video with a message inviting ideas for the Town Board. This has been shared 68 times on Facebook and through other communication channels (e.g. through LinkedIn and Rother Voluntary Action) and has had over 8,000 views.

Cllr Hollidge noted that with regards to strategic alignment, a key issue is that the County and District Councils need to be feeding in, in terms of whether proposals are achievable, whether they have strategic alignment, and should be able to feed in regarding relevant strategic developments. Part of the challenge for the Town Board is that many organisations have their own strategic visions, and we need to align these as much as possible.

KB added that Hastings Town Board are looking forward to working in co-operation with Bexhill Town Board, as neighbours.

PW raised the issue of older people and people with disabilities as a gap. AR noted further that whilst they are represented in emails to the Town Board, this is anecdotal and needs to be more systematic.

The Chair emphasised the importance of all Town Board members 'spreading the word' and encouraging engagement through the Bexhill Town board email address.

KB noted that the PCC had previously used an agency and they had achieved good coverage. This is an option for the future.

BB suggested consultation with the East Sussex Youth Cabinet. IH suggested an approach to the Youth Cabinet from all three Town Boards of Hastings, Eastbourne and Bexhill.

3a. Email to Town Board members from HM (Notes taken by OJ)

The Chair addressed Howard Martin's email, which was sent to Town Board members ahead of the meeting regarding issues raised in business engagement, the optics of representation from the business community's perspective and the delivery of the secretariat by RDC.

The Chair emphasised the need to have one unified vision that represented all stakeholders in the community and that the Board represents a broad base of perspectives and further diversity due to Members' wider experience and skills in business, in particular.

The Chair encouraged the Board to lead strongly to present a constructive message with regard to what the Board is trying to achieve and ensure that we do so positively and proactively through the engagement with the communities that members engage with and represent. The Chair thanked and acknowledged Howard Martin's substantial business consultation offer.

The Chair acknowledged the significant and highly skilled input from Anne Rathbone and Joe Powell at RDC, including Anne's working being used as 'best practice' examples by DLUHC. This was endorsed by Board Members.

On the topic of the vision statement to be produced by 1st August, the Chair outlined the need for this to be high level, strategic and representative of all sectors of the community and that this is the next step in the process before more detail and detailed processes are added.

HM raised the issue of the perception of RDC control, where communications were coming from a rother.gov.uk email address, which is an issue that has been raised through the business consultation so far. This was acknowledged, but it was also noted the benefits are of a robust accountability system that is provided by Council email addresses in line with their public obligations.

The Chair stated, after agreement by the Board, that the role of the secretariat would remain as it is until 1st August, with extra resources an option moving forwards from this point to further support this role.

Cllr Oliver clarified that DLUHC guidance is clear and that it is our responsibility to deliver in line with the Guidance laid out.

The Board supported all the recommendations given by the Chair.

4. Capacity funding (notes taken by OJ)

Joe Powell led the board through a presentation on Capacity costs.

The following comments were made in correspondence with the presentation:

- The chair shared that the costs broken down in the spreadsheets are transparent and appropriate and she is confident that they represent very good value.
- It was stated that the salary figures included on costs at 30-35% to ensure full cost recovery for RDC.
- The chair clarified that the accountancy role is not fulfilled by herself, or her firm.
- The Communications costs to date is around £2.5k including the website. This is additional to the capacity costs represented and will be allocated against the Community and Business Engagement budget
- There is a built in 3% uplift to budgets and projections, in line with RDC's planned salary uplift in September 2024. This projection would be revised as appropriate in September.
- The new Project officer role is 50% FTE for a 6-month period (Sep '24 – Mar '24)
- The Head of service role is fulfilled by Joe Powell, at a current rate of half a day a week, also including 30%-35% on-costs.

It was the collective opinion that the costs presented, represented value for money.

Cllr Wilson asked whether one extra part-time role is enough, or whether further resources could be invested. This to be reviewed later.

The Chair reminded members that Anne's time is precious so we should ensure her time spent responding to Board member enquiries was kept to a minimum.

All members voted in support of the current infrastructure on the basis of a quarterly review.

5. Update on development groups and decision making processes

This was discussed as part of agenda item 9. below

6. Interim quantitative evidence presentation

The Chair welcomed Scott Marshall and Bruce Nairn who gave a slide presentation on their data work so far. The presentation was designed to inform Town Board discussions later in the agenda regarding direction of travel for decision making on vision and the first 3 year investment plan. The summary slides are attached as Appendix A.

Bruce introduced the presentation by noting that quantitative data is most useful taken in a wider context. Numbers tell us what is happening (or might be happening) and qualitative data gives us insight into how and why. For example, low retail vacancy rates only give so much information as the quality of retail or food outlets is also important indicator of deprivation or health and wellbeing and economic health.

Questions that the data highlighted included:

- How can we make the town more visitor friendly?
- How can better wayfinding contribute to this for e.g. the lack of exits from the station directly into the town?
- How can we optimise the impact of the significant LUF funding that has gone into modernisation of the De La Warr Pavilion to ensure visitor numbers and the town centre also benefits and that residents can benefit?

Questions and comments from the Board:

- IH the data regarding numbers of pubs gives a false picture. There are many private clubs and more than 5 pubs when Bexhill is taken as a whole. This needs to be addressed.
- IH there are more than 100 cycle places at the station (mostly funded by DFT) whereas the data says cycle places are limited.
- HM: There is a need to align the work to that being done by 1066 especially learning about increasing visitor numbers.
- PW: Asked can we see direct comparisons in terms of deprivation in different areas. Bruce confirmed that this will be picked up in the wider report.
- HM: the data feeding the conclusion that there are 'few residential units' in the town centre is wrong and needs to be addressed. The town centre is substantially residential, and this is one of its strengths, although the area is characterised by low income overall. Bruce Nairn agreed to revisit the dataset in this regard.

AR confirmed that Marshall Regen would also be looking at a number of towns to draw learning from their approaches.

7. Update on community engagement

Due to shortage of time, this report was dealt with by exception. Most of the plan is on track apart from some consultations that have had to be delayed because of the pre-election period restrictions.

Actions and what is needed to address gaps are noted in the action log.

8. First stage of decision making

AR outlined what is needed in terms of next steps. We need a clear agreed timeline to pull engagement findings together and clarity on the process for getting ideas to the Town Board for the next meeting.

The timeline that was agreed was:

- Community engagement deadline 21st June
- Analysis and summary by 30th June linked to themes and menu of interventions – to be sent out to Town Board members.
- Papers for Town Board sent out 5th July
- Town Board meeting 12th July
- Section 151 sign off for governance by 22nd July
- RDC Corporate Board sign off by 25th July
- Chairs sign off of vision and investment plan by 26th July

Town Board members will be asked to contribute to the co-construction of the vision and investment plan outside of the main Board meeting.

With regard to the working groups for the three funding themes, clarity is needed. Following discussion, the Board agreed that:

- Working groups could start to be formed in terms of membership, purpose and scope but are unlikely to meet before 1st August deadline
- What we are looking to produce is a high level plan and vision and assessment and funding of specific projects will be worked through later.
- We need to define the role of Town Board members in the working groups. Some felt that Town Board members should not be on the working groups and others felt that was important as a feedback loop.
- There should be clear Terms of Reference for each group, worked out after 1st August deadline to DLUHC.

9. Next steps

OJ asked about sharing the Chair's call to action video. Agreed that AR would share the link as soon as possible to all Town Board members. In the meantime, it is available on Bexhill Unwrapped Facebook page and can be shared from there.

Following the 4th of July, an update on the findings from engagement could go out through My Alert, social media and the website, depending on what stage of decision making by the Town Board was at.

HM raised the issue of communications and that it needs commissioning out to a third party service provider. The Chair replied that this was a matter for after 1st August DLUHC deadline when the election has passed, and the Board has re-ratified guidance from DLUHC about how the Long Term Plan for Towns can move forward.

10. Any other business

Deferred to next meeting – Kim Richards idea of a small grants scheme for community organisations/businesses in line with the three funding themes/priorities

Added to the Action Log

AR to share the link to the Chairs video as soon as possible to all Town Board members.

AR to contact East Sussex Youth Cabinet to engage them in the Town Board engagement.

AR to contact the Youth Council run by Education Futures Trust to identify whether they have any Bexhill young people – in consultation with Eastbourne and Hastings Town Boards.

AR to explore further key strategic documents for alignments.

EG to bring up the Town Board engagement with the Primary School Board Heads.

AR to address gaps in older people and disability to develop a more systematic approach.

AR and BB to liaise re health venues engagement.

AR to send out list of towns that Marshall Regen are looking at to draw out any learning.

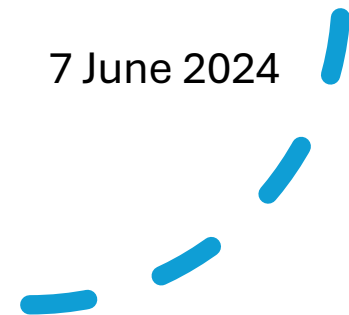
Date of next meeting: Friday 12th July 24 from 2.30pm to 5pm at De La Warr Pavilion Studios

Long-Term Plan
for Towns

Bexhill
Evidence Base

Bruce Nairne &
Scott Marshall

7 June 2024



Bexhill

An Overview

- 44,600 residents in 21,100 households
- Median age: 54 years
- Population Change (2001 -2020): + 5,400, driven by in-migration
- 2,163-3,398 new dwellings by 2040
- GVA: £623 million; GVA per Job: £33,151 – well below England average
- 12,000 jobs, 45% in Central & Collington wards
- 905 unemployed claimant count residents
- Half the adult population has highest qualification below Level 3



Many Bexhills? – Population


	All Ages	0-15	16-29	30-44	0-44	45-64	65+
England	100	19.2	17.2	19.5	55.9	25.6	18.5
South East	100	19.3	16.0	18.6	53.9	26.5	19.7
East Sussex	100	16.9	13.4	15.6	45.9	28.0	26.1
Rother	100	15.0	11.9	12.9	39.8	27.9	32.3
Bexhill Central	100	16.1	16.2	17.3	49.6	26.4	22.3
Bexhill Collington	100	7.9	6.6	7.2	21.7	25.8	48.5
Bexhill Kewhurst	100	12.0	9.1	10.5	31.6	23.9	41.7
Bexhill Old Town & Worsham	100	15.9	13.1	15.0	43.9	24.4	28.3
Bexhill Pebsham & St Michaels	100	15.2	12.8	14.6	42.6	27.6	28.1
Bexhill Sackville	100	9.2	11.4	12.2	32.9	24.9	37.5
Bexhill Sidley	100	21.4	15.1	15.9	52.4	25.3	20.8
Bexhill St Marks	100	10.8	6.5	9.0	26.3	26.9	43.7
Bexhill St Stephens	100	15.9	14.1	14.8	44.9	27.3	26.5

Many Bexhills...

- 4,300 non-White British Residents; 632 households with at least one non-English speaker (Central & Sackville wards);
- 4,400 households without access to a car: Central, Sackville and Sidley;
- 5,800 schoolchildren/students– a fifth of whom live in Sidley
- 1,200 lone parent households– 45% of whom live in Sidley or Central
- 20,100 economic inactive adults:- 55% of residents in Collington are retired; compared with 24% in Sidley & 29% in Central
- 18,200 adult residents without Level 3 qualifications– 55% of Sidley’s adults
- 10,100 (59%) working residents in lower/intermediate level jobs – 69% in Sidley & Central
- 5,790 income deprived; 2,510 employment deprived: 48% in Central & Sidley wards

A large orange shape on the left side of the slide, consisting of a vertical rectangle on the left and a quarter-circle on the right. The text 'Safety & Security' is written in white inside this shape.

Safety & Security

- Crime stats caveats
 - High level of social trust and low crime rate - 85.2 crimes per 1,000 residents
 - Increase in no. crimes since 2018, increase in shoplifting
 - The Safer Hastings & Rother Partnership Board priorities:
 - Protecting vulnerable people
 - Making businesses and streets safer (street - related crime and anti-social behaviour)
 - Road safety
- 
- A decorative blue shape on the right side of the slide, consisting of several curved, parallel lines that form a partial arc.

High Streets, Heritage & Regeneration

- 121 commercial outlets; 56,000 sq.m of floorspace
- Low commercial vacancy rate – 8.3%
- Low footfall – 80.5 (index score)
- Reduced Venuescore – 483 (2009) to 592 (2017)
- Reduced retail capacity since 2018: e-commerce; home-working
- 62 F&B (5 bars; 20 cafes' 18 restaurants; 5 pubs; 14 fastfood outlets
- Lack of Family Entertainment Venues (FEV)
- Cultural assets e.g.: De La Warr; The Colonnade – 100+ listed buildings/monuments etc
- Edwardian seafront - key asset for the town
- Few residential units in the town centre

Transport & Connectivity

- 1.4 million entries/exits at Bexhill station: 345,000 between Bexhill & Hastings; 1.5 million pre-pandemic
- Combe Valley Way increased connectivity with Hastings, but A259 approaching theoretical capacity; severance of the town centre
- Generally good digital connectivity– 71% of premises with gigabit broadband capacity
- Generally good access to services, but less good to the town centre by walking/cycling/public transport; perceived poor north-south connectivity
- Gaps in public transport provision
- Limited cycle parking at station
- Wayfinding and access
- Car dominance?



Other Inequalities Issues

- **Deprivation** - concentrated deprivation: Sidley; Central; increased use of food banks
- **Fuel Poverty** - Noticeable increase in utilities related enquiries at CAB; 10.5% households with fuel poverty
- **Homelessness** - Steady increase in homelessness pre Covid
- **Education** - School performance – Key Stage 2?; Secondary school performance reflects intake?; strong FE college
- **Recreation & Leisure** - Deficit in recreation facilities; Family Entertainment Venues
- **Health** – lower life expectancy in Bexhill East & Pebsham; Bexhill North & Sidley



Emerging Themes?

- **Planning for population growth**
 - Who is the town centre for? Who will the new residents be?
 - **Town centre diversification**
 - F&B; town centre living; leisure; meeting place; public realm
 - **Connectivity & movement**
 - Digital; access and wayfinding; active travel; strategic connections
 - **Building on cultural & creative assets; planned increase in visitors**
 - Making the most of De La Warr, Beeching Road Studios, Bexhill College etc
 - A new narrative for Bexhill?
 - **Deprivation & Inequality**
 - Spatial focus: Sidley; Central
- 