

Minutes of Bexhill Town Board

Meeting of 10 May 2024

Venue: The Pelham, Holliers Hill, Bexhill-on-Sea TN40 2DD

Meeting Attendance

Board Member	Attendance	Attendance comment
Abi Newbury, FCA (Chair)	Y	N/A
Dr Binodh Bhaskaran	Y	N/A
Dr Mandy Curtis	Y	N/A
Eleanore Gordon	Y	N/A
Cllr Ian Hollidge	Y	N/A
Ollie Jeffs	Y	N/A
Howard Martin	Y	N/A
Huw Merriman, MP	Y	N/A
Cllr Doug Oliver	Y	N/A
Kim Richards	Y	N/A
Cllr Paul Wilson	Y	N/A
Katy Bourne, OBE	Y	N/A

Secretariat/Governance

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

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

Observers/guests:

Lorna Ford, Chief Executive, Rother District Council for Accountable Body function.

Harriet Acland, Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC)

Item 1: Chair's welcome and introductions

The Chair welcomed everyone to the first meeting. The Chair was selected through careful consultation by the local MP with the Local Authority, in line with Government guidance. The other board members were selected by the Chair as representatives of organisations mandatory in the guidance and additionally, as representatives of community and business. They were chosen for their experience, knowledge and expertise relevant to making the regeneration and development of Bexhill a reality. We need to listen to what the community and business are telling us and use this to make informed decisions about how we spend our allocation over the next ten years.

Item 2: Declarations of interest for Members and Officers

The Chair reminded everyone that in doing Town Board business, it is essential that we follow strict procedures in declaring our interests. Members were reminded of the need to declare any interests immediately prior to the commencement of the agenda item in question.

Item 3: Introduction to Rother District Council as the Accountable Body

By Lorna Ford, Chief Exec, Joe Powell, Head of Housing and Regeneration, Rother District Council (RDC)

RDC is the body, appointed by DLUHC to be accountable for the Long Term Plan for Towns spend and ensuring appropriate governance of the Town Board arrangements.

It has the role of providing the Secretariat function to the Board, which includes support and development of partnerships, overseeing community and business engagement and co-ordinating the implementation of Town Board decisions, priorities and actions. It also potentially has a role as a future delivery vehicle for Town Board sponsored projects.

RDC is committed to supporting the Town Board in this fresh way of working.

Item 4 for information: DLUHC expectations and offer to Bexhill Town Board

By Harriet Acland, DLUHC Adviser

Harriet outlined the background to the programme, highlighting the Long Term Plan for Towns as a core part of the broader Levelling Up Programme. Bexhill-on-Sea is one of 75 towns (on March 24) identified across Great Britain to receive funding. The Towns Unit, chaired by Adam Hawksbee, reports directly to the Prime Minister and Secretary of State for Levelling Up and will continue to support the town Boards. The Department has published Guidance [Long-Term Plan for Towns: guidance for local authorities and Town Boards - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/long-term-plan-for-towns-guidance-for-local-authorities-and-town-boards) including a policy toolkit and a list of flexible policy interventions. The interventions should be tailored to suit local characteristics. Town Boards can take forward interventions outside of this list if they submit a separate business case to DLUHC as part of their Long-Term Plan.

With regard to the funding:

- Almost £20m is provisionally allocated to Bexhill as an endowment fund – split between £25% revenue, £75% capital. Bexhill will receive an annual predetermined amount – it is a broadly flat profile across the 10-year span of the programme.
- Capacity funding has already been made available to enable resourcing of the Town Board support and governance, establishment of the Town Board and Community Engagement.
- Once the Town Board's Long-Term Plan has been assessed and approved, following submission on 1st August 24, Bexhill will then receive the first CDEL payment of £500,000 (Capital) and RDEL of £249,000 (Revenue).
- From FY25/26, towns will receive an annual payment of over £2 million per annum (Capital and Revenue combined total).
- The funding arrangement provides towns with the flexibility to rollover the funding into future years. However, funding cannot be pulled forward.

- At the end of the first three-year investment plan cycle, for Finance Year 27/28, there will be a built-in 'check-in point', to analyse delivery across the first three-years alongside the submission of the next three-year investment plan.

With regard to programme approach / investment plan:

- DLUHC expect the Long Plan for Towns to be developed in close consultation with local residents and for this to be well evidenced. The ringfenced capacity funding provided should be used for this, with a principle of passporting a healthy proportion to local community organisations.
- The Town Board's Long-Term Plan must include a three-year investment plan alongside the ten-year vision statement that sets out the proposed policy interventions the Town Board wishes to pursue. A template will be provided by the LTPT team and there is a deadline for the investment plan and vision statement to be submitted to government by 1 August.
- Towns that want to move faster than the 1 August deadline for investment plans can submit plans before 1 August but shouldn't start activities at risk prior to funding.

Data packs:

- Tailored data packs for each town have been published, produced by the Office for National Statistics and the Department's Spatial Data Unit. The default geography for towns is based on the latest available ONS data, rather than constituencies or wards.

DLUHC monitoring and support:

- Plans will need to be agreed by the lead local authority (RDC) and by UK government. Assessment will include ensuring that the interventions in each plan align with the broader objectives of the Long Term Plan for Towns and fit within the 3 investment themes, that the plan is community informed and deliverable and that there is appropriate capacity, capability and management systems in place to ensure effective delivery and oversight.
- RDC is the Accountable Body and a representative for governance will sit on the Board with observer status. It is the responsibility of the Town Board to ensure good use of public funds and RDC is the ultimate local decision arbiter of this, reporting to DLUHC.
- The government has committed to delivering a High Streets and Towns Taskforce by the end of 2024 to work with towns to provide bespoke, direct support to help them deliver interventions in their plan. In the meantime, the Delivery Associate Networks, a partnership of experienced delivery professionals, can offer support to Towns Boards to develop their Long Term Plans. They can offer support according to two themes- community engagement and creating the long term plan. The support available is in the format of a 2 hour interactive workshop and there is a dedicated webpage for Towns Board use.

Harriet's role as Deputy Area Head is to be a communication channel between the Town's Unit (which reports directly to the Prime Minister) and the Town Board, via the accountable body.

Item 5 for Board Update: Update on preparatory work already undertaken to establish the Town Board and respond to DLUHC initial requirements

By Anne Rathbone, Levelling Up Partnership Manager

A considerable amount of work has already been undertaken, both to establish the Town Board and to meet DLUHC deadlines for the development of the first return and the upcoming submission of the 10 year vision and 3 year investment plan.

The Board Chair, Membership have been selected in line with DLUHC guidance and have been approved by DLUHC on the first governance return on 1st April 24.

Monthly liaison meetings are in place between RDC and DLUHC.

Finance and governance systems have been initially established and this is in ongoing development. A capacity costs paper is being prepared for the Town Board, so that resource costs and spend are transparent.

Draft Terms of Reference have been drafted, referencing DLUHC advice and examples from other towns as signposted by DLUHC.

An outline plan for community and business engagement formed part of the 01 April governance return. Work on this plan is in progress and an updated plan forms part of the agenda to follow.

A specialist consultancy service – Marshall Regen – has been commissioned to pull together the quantitative evidence base and liaise with the LUP Partnership Manager and other stakeholders to identify gaps and cross reference their work with community and business generated evidence.

A paper proposing a decision making structure and processes follows on the agenda

An interim communications plan has been developed and implemented through RDC. This includes establishing a standalone web site for the Town Board – bexhilltownboard.co.uk and a dedicated email address bexhilltownboard@rother.gov.uk which is to be shared widely across the town to encourage community and business engagement.

Item 6: Interim Terms of Reference

Presented for update, comment and approval as interim until 1st August 24.

The Chair introduced the draft Interim Terms of Reference. These have been prepared taking into account what other towns, who are a bit further along with their Town Boards, have done. It has had comments from DLUHC which have been addressed. The Terms address:

The arrangements for appointment of Chair and Members. Members can be added at any time. The Board is considered interim until 01 August 24 during which time membership may be added to or otherwise amended.

Until 31 July the Board will meet monthly to consider our vision and plans.

Regarding attendance, members should seek to attend consistently. Members representing the mandated organisations must send a Deputy if they are unable to attend for any reason

Members should attend one out of two meetings as a minimum.

All decisions will be taken by a simple majority of those attending. Members have equal voting rights, with the exception of the Chair whose vote will carry in the event of an equal vote split.

The Terms outline the respective roles of Rother District Council as Secretariat, Partnership and Town Board support, Accountable Body and potential delivery partner. It recognises that several members will have more than one role in relation to the work of the Board.

The paper introduces the Code of Conduct and Declarations of Interest system, both of which followed in the agenda.

Discussion and comments:

Some declarations of interest arose from the discussion. Several Members also sit on the Hastings Town Board and the Eastbourne Chamber.

Cllr Hollidge: this can be a positive for cross reference and liaison.

Howard Martin: Important that Bexhill keeps hold of its own priorities in its decision making and discussions. There should be co-operation but not sharing of finances.

Cllr Wilson requested the ability to nominate a delegated representative. Huw Merriman supported this extension, recognising that the Town Council is a democratically elected body. This request was agreed by the Board.

Decisions:

The Board unanimously approved the Terms of Reference as interim, with a review by 1st August 24, subject to it being noted that the Town Council representative is able to nominate a delegated representative.

Actions

Action	Who	Deadline
Pick up discussion about strategic alignments and feed in to Town Board	AR and Cllr Hollidge	By next meeting 07 June 24
Add Bexhill Town Council to list of organisations that can nominate a delegated representative in case of inability to attend	AR and Cllr Wilson	31 May 24

Item 7: Code of Conduct, Declaration of Interest statement and Boundary Map

Presented for update, comment and approval

Code of Conduct:

The Chair introduced the Code of Conduct for the Board discussion and approval. These have been produced in line with the Nolan Principles and DLUHC guidance.

There were no comments on the Code of Conduct and all Board Members and Supporting Officers signed the Code.

Declaration of Interest statement:

The Chair introduced the overarching Declaration of Interest guidance in the interim Terms of Reference. This has also been prepared in line with guidance.

Further work will be undertaken prior to the next meeting to develop the Register of Interests and a more detailed policy.

Boundary map:

The Map was provisionally agreed with DLUHC as the area within which the Town Board can fund activities. It has been developed to be inclusive so that the Town Board has maximum options in developing its priorities and plans. The original DLUHC map was more limited in area. There were

several comments about the map. Several members questioned why the map boundary was not the Bexhill-on-Sea town boundary. This would then be more inclusive for community and business engagement and mean that key community facilities were not inadvertently excluded. Harriet agreed to liaise with DLUHC about whether a revised map could be approved. Huw Merriman agreed also to support this.

Decisions:

Code of Conduct agreed and signed by Board members and supporting officers.

The overarching statement of Declaration Interests was agreed.

Town Board ratification of the boundary map deferred pending a revised version being submitted to DLUHC for approval.

Actions

Action	Who	Deadline
Codes of Conducts signatures to be kept on file	AR	10 May 24
Register of interests developed Detailed Interests policy developed.	AR	31 May 24
Map boundary revision to be submitted to DLUHC for approval.	AR/JP	17 May 24

Item 8: Community and business engagement and comms plan

Presented for update, comment and approval

These plans have necessarily been started by the Levelling Up Partnership Manager, to meet DLUHC requirements and timescales.

DLUHC have commended the proportional breakdown of this ringfenced capacity to community, business engagement and community support infrastructure and co-ordination capacity.

The paper outlines the aim and approach, to maximise involvement and ownership of priorities and plans by being open, inclusive and respectful in our engagement.

Key deliverables over the next few months are completion of the first phase of the community and business engagement to inform our priorities. The outputs of launch press release and standalone website/dedicated email address have already been met.

It outlines the role of the Levelling Up Partnership Manager in co-ordination and day to day oversight of engagement activities and pathways, working alongside community organisations and businesses.

The paper describes the interim work undertaken by RDC Comms and Web Team to get the Town Board to the point of launch and recommends that the Town Board considers its comms needs going forward and how they can best be met.

All work scheduled is currently on target, if not already complete. Current RAG score Green.

Kim Richards and Howard Martin spoke also to the plan, and reiterated their support of the approach and the added value it offers in terms of an opportunity for infrastructure capacity development longer term.

Katy Bourne checked that the consultants commission and other community/business contracts of service were all undertaken properly under procurement legislation/guidance. AR confirmed that this was the case.

Cllr Paul Wilson raised the need to engage with sports and physical activity clubs, which make a significant contribution to resilience, a ‘team player’ mindset, positive community activity and cohesion. Sports clubs often attract members that might feel excluded or reluctant to join other community activity.

Eleanor Gordon highlighted that schools were a great place for engagement, not only directly with children and young people but also with their families.

Dr Binodh also emphasised the opportunities to engage people with health problems and a cross section of the community, via health practices.

Cllr Ian Hollidge noted that widespread public engagement was also important, not only targeted engagement. There was discussion of how Town Board members might get involved in community events. There was general agreement that a leaflet/flyer or series of flyers is needed as soon as possible, to inform and engage the community through different methods and outlets.

Huw Merriman, MP made two points: firstly, Board Members should be careful not to try to over-influence project proposals but allow them to emerge from the community; secondly, that the Board is well advised by our DLUHC Adviser to keep to the menu of interventions (within which there is good scope for interpretation) that have been pre-approved by DLUHC (based on their own work on the evidence base for them). These are outlined in the Decision Making Structure paper (see below Item 9).

Decisions:

The community and business engagement (and comms) plan was welcomed.

AR to address points raised by the Board and incorporate them into the plan and activities.

AR to inform the Board of key managed engagement opportunities in case they would like to be involved.

Actions

Action	Who	Deadline
Make sure that young people’s engagement is extended to schools and health practices	AR to liaise with EG and BB	01 June 24
Ensure a focus on engagement with and through sports clubs and wider physical activity	AR to liaise with Cllr PW	17 May 24
Develop initial leaflet/flyer based on temporary background images from web site	AR with Chair’s sign off	31 May 24
Town Board members kept informed of face to face engagement opportunities	AR to keep members updated	ongoing

Item 9: Decision making structures and processes

Presented for comment and approval

The paper represented the first stage in working through decision making structures and processes. The big challenge is how to be open and encouraging to community and business ideas for improvement,

whilst having a coherent and well-managed process for decision making. The paper proposed a framework for this which includes a development group focused on each one of the DLUHC priorities.

It proposes that the Town Board leads by identifying its locality priorities and relative emphasis on the three funding themes, and what balance it wishes to aim for in terms of quicker, easily visible projects and long term projects.

The Town Board decision making needs to align with community/business engagement findings, strategic alignments and opportunities and ensure it meets governance requirements (via the RDC representative as the accountable body).

Discussion centred on the need also to have some themed working groups to advise the Town Board and develop ideas in relation to, for example young people, culture, environment and sport.

Decision

To note and approve the decision making structure and ensure ongoing input from Board Members as to its most effective membership, leadership and implementation.

Actions

Action	Who	Deadline
Take forward development of working groups, consulting with Board but also moving forward to meet deadlines	AR to liaise with Chair and identify next steps	17 May 24

Item 10: Any other business

Several members warned against the Board trying to have too many priorities and spread its impact too thinly.

Actions

Action	Who	Deadline
An overarching action log is required.	AR	31 May 24
Forward plan of dates is required.	AR	31 May 24
Forward agenda plan is required.	AR	31 May 24

Date of next meeting: Friday 07 June 24 from 2.30pm to 5pm at De La Warr Pavilion Studios