

# Bexhill Town Board

## MINUTES OF MEETING 13 December 2024

Venue: Rother Town Hall, Bexhill. Time: 2pm-4.30pm

### Meeting Attendance

Board Member	Attendance	Attendance comment
Abi Newbury, FCA (Chair)	Y	N/A
Dr Binodh Bhaskaran (BB)	Y	N/A
Dr Mandy Curtis (MC)	Y	N/A
Eleanore Gordon (EG)	Y	N/A
Frances McKenna on behalf of Dr Kieran Mullan MP	Y	N/A
Cllr Doug Oliver (DO)	Y	N/A
Cllr Paul Wilson (PW)	Y	N/A
Simon Morris (SM) on behalf of Katy Bourne, OBE (KB)	Y	N/A
Stewart Drew (SD)	Y	N/A
Ollie Jeffs (OJ)	Y	From 3pm
Kim Richards (KR)	N	Apologies given
Cllr Ian Hollidge (IH)	N	Apologies given

### 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

Apologies from Harriet Acland, MHCLG

### Item 1: Chairs welcome and minutes of last meeting

The minutes of the last meeting were taken as approved and are uploaded on the Bexhill Town Board website.

The Chair welcomed everyone back, following the good news that the Long Term Plan for Towns funding has been confirmed by Government.

The Chair reiterated the purpose of the meeting as follows:

- Brief update on the Long Term Plan for Towns funding situation and advice from MHCLG
- Brief update on LUP Managers activity and Town Board budget
- Discuss and agree way forward for branding and communications and for the range of ways to engage business and community going forward
- Next stage of exploring potential priorities, pending new guidance due from January 2025

## **Item 2: declaration of Interests of Town Board members**

The Chair read out the Declaration of Interest statement that is standard for every meeting:

*“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.”*

AR confirmed that she had sight of all relevant interests that need to be taken into account in discussions today and that the register of interests was up to date for all members, with the exception of Anna Evett who will be taken over from Joe Powell as Governance observer advisor.

## **Item 3: Action Log**

AR went through the action log. All actions are green (up to date or completed).

**Action:** AR to keep action log updated with actions from this meeting and to report back on or before next Board meeting

## **Item 4: Update on Long Term Plan for Towns funding**

Anne has met with MHCLG Advisors and Policy Advisors several times since the reconfirmation announcement. Members have been updated by email as we have received updates. The most relevant points are that:

- we will receive the same amount of funding as before but from April 26 over 10 years
- we will receive an additional £200k next year, for planning, feasibility, engagement and business case preparation – this is not for use to fund delivery projects
- we are expecting to have new funding guidance in January 25, and this will confirm the scope of what we can have as priorities
- we are expecting to have to deliver our plans around September 25, but this is to be confirmed
- MHCLG advice is not to appoint any new TB members until further guidance is issued

There will be a raft of strategies coming down over the next few weeks and months that are relevant including the industrial strategy, youth strategy, devolution strategy. We will keep our eye on all of these to make sure we are making the right strategic links

## **Item 5: Budget update and LUP Manager activity**

There is no new spend on the budget apart from an additional spend for salary and related costs. All allocations have been processed and the budget is up to date.

AR activity has focused on:

- Liaison with MHCLG Advisors
- Getting an overview of existing and proposed strategies and plans at national and local level and starting the process of linking these to our engagement findings, pending confirmation of the funding prospectus from MHCLG in 2025
- Liaising with Town Board members to identify and align ideas for taking a strategic response
- Attending key stakeholder strategic and networking meetings for engagement and maximising strategic alignment

Time spent on LUP projects has been calculated at 6% and this has been recharged from LUP capacity to the Town Board budget to accommodate time spent.

### **Item 6: Branding and Communications**

Comms has been an interim arrangement so far and we need to identify dedicated comms support.

AR did a basic analysis of what we have and is working well and what we need to source.

It was agreed that we need to source:

- Branding
- Ongoing comms support for press releases, social media posting and management as needed

As part of scoping out a specification we need to include:

- Who our various audiences are
- What kind of comms we need and for which audiences
- What we think we might be doing
- What we might need when and how often
- How our comms links to our community and business engagement

We need to ensure that the BoSTC in particular, and also RDC and ESCC, is consulted – so that our messaging and branding is complementary but does not duplicate

It was agreed that MC, SD and AR would support the Chair to scope out a specification and get additional support in place as soon as possible. AR to keep the Board updated with progress and ask for sign off by email at key points.

Agreed to aim to get support in place by March meeting.

RDC as accountable body will procure on behalf of the Town Board basis of 3 quotes but with full Town Board involvement in: budget; specification; selection and any other substantive decision making required.

### **Item 7: Methods to engage with the widest range of businesses**

AR has liaised with various Town Board members about how to maximise impact from business engagement as we go forward.

Business engagement is as essential as community engagement in formulation and implementation of Town Board priorities and plans.

Town Board members noted that:

Membership of the Town Board includes a good representation of business

We should maximise our engagement with business in as many ways as possible and also have focused engagement in relation to specific ideas for priorities

There are many and diverse existing forums or groups which directly represent business, or where business people have high representation, for example:

- Bexhill Chamber of Commerce
- 1066 Country Marketing Board – Bexhill representatives
- Team/Skills East Sussex have a range of groups that have business representation including SES Network groups for Creative, Cultural Digital and Media; Construction; Land based
- Federation of small businesses
- Rother Voluntary Action
- Rotary Club membership
- Bexhill Lions membership
- Boss Babes (on Facebook)
- Sussex Chamber of Commerce

There are also ways to engage with individual businesses directly, for example:

- We could instigate or request a business leaders group, if appropriate and use the insight coming from existing groups
- We could bring together groups of businesses/representatives as needed in relation to specific priorities or explorations
- We could host an event that brings together businesses with other stakeholders to map out plans and priorities across the range of stakeholders
- We would include business engagement in every engagement plan for specific projects,, tailored to the scope and purpose of the proposed project
- ESCC Open Door has a list of Bexhill Businesses we can reach out to

Relevant methods to be employed depending on our phase of planning and project implementation going forward.

### **Item 8: Break and Networking**

### **Item 9: Starting to build ideas for priorities development**

Strategic priorities are emerging in alignment with community and business engagement and with existing and forthcoming Government priorities, which are likely to be reflected in the new funding guidance.

These are not ready to be publicly shared in detail but can be further explored whilst we are waiting for Government guidance detail. They involve exploration of ways to increase footfall in town centre for economic wellbeing and regeneration of town centre and other businesses; how to provide opportunities for young people's employment and entrepreneurship; promoting investment and taking a whole town strategic approach that lines up with what any Town, District or County Council plans. The discussions from the last meeting should also be captured.

These were discussed and it was agreed that AR should take forward these ideas, explore the evidence base behind them including from our own community and business engagement and how they might fit together. Members agreed that plans should be as transformative as possible for the long term plans for the town and avoid a piecemeal approach.

**Item 10: Next steps**

AR to take forward exploration of strategic priorities with Town Board members and bringing in other key stakeholders as required. AR to provide interim feedback to Town Board members and report back on progress at the March meeting.

**Item 11: Any other business**

Joe Powell will still be available to support the Town Board in relation to aligning RDC activity and plans with Town Board priorities.

On behalf of members, the Chair thanked Joe Powell for his support and commitment to the setting up and first year of the Town Board.

SM thanked the Board and noted that it had been a very helpful meeting and that the Town Board was doing well.

**Date of next meeting:** Friday 7<sup>th</sup> March 2pm to 5pm (please note extension of time)