

**Towns
Fund** 
Delivery Partner



**OUR
TOWN
STORIES** 

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FOREWORD

As the Towns Fund Delivery Partner, supporting the Towns Fund programme, our mission was two-fold: to provide strategic and technical support to towns in shaping their ambitions and delivering projects; and better equip towns to help them realise their ambitions in the future. A key part of the latter has been to highlight the stories of the remarkable people making change happen in their towns across England.

Our aim has been to provide a diverse snapshot of towns starting on a journey to bring about regeneration and stimulate local economic activity. The stories represent a moment in time and bring to life the experiences of some of the 101 towns selected to bid for government funding at different stages of development and delivery of their projects. Some towns have taken this opportunity to discuss the challenges at the beginning and the rewards of establishing a strong Town Deal Board. Other towns - who received Accelerated Funds for ready-to-go projects - are already delivering, and tangible results and benefits are beginning to emerge from these early investments.

From the outset, we have sought to engage with towns on the programme to identify and communicate compelling stories. Our approach has been to gather stories centered on inviting towns to shape their own narratives, engaging the individuals acting on behalf of their communities, and listening to what matters most.

From this dialogue with towns three formats emerged: an in-depth look at a specific journey through the Towns Fund programme; the 'Open Call' which invited towns to submit their own story in response to a series of future-focused prompts; and 'Conversations' between towns on a particular theme.

The stories are collected here in chronological order from when they were first published on the TFDP website. Together this collection of stories created with, and by towns, capture the learning, creativity and hard work of the people involved.

The stories we tell shape our experiences, allow us to learn from the challenges we face, and share our vision for the future with others. In the coming months and years, storytelling by the people who are making this happen on the ground in their towns, will become ever more crucial to helping communities make important connections between their pasts, present and futures.



OUR TOWN STORIES UNFOLD

As stories were told and published during 2021, this diagram also captures where they were on their Towns Fund journeys at that point in time.



KEY STAGES OF TOWNS FUND PROGRAMME



TOWN INVESTMENT PLAN (TIP) SUBMITTED

TIP (including proposed projects) has been agreed by Town Deal Board and submitted to government



BUSINESS CASE DEVELOPMENT

Having received a Town Deal Offer from government, Town is confirming projects being taken forward and preparing Business Cases to prepare for delivery



DARLINGTON

A TOWN INVESTMENT PLAN THAT HAS LIFTED SPIRITS

DARLINGTON

A TOWN INVESTMENT PLAN THAT HAS LIFTED SPIRITS

A confident team ready to build on existing strengths and gain momentum

When Heather Scott, Leader of Darlington Borough Council and her cabinet were invited to submit a plan for investment in the town, they already had the kernel of an idea to focus on 'gateways' and a 'pearl string' of activity through the town.

"You've got to go into these things confidently", Heather says, and being able to recognise their existing strengths enabled the Darlington team to do just that.

Chris Mains, Towns Fund Programme Manager for Darlington Borough Council, joined the team in March 2020 with the specific role of bringing together the Town Investment Plan (TIP) for Darlington. It was a steep learning curve for Chris, with the submission deadline of July just months away. It soon became clear that all the components were already there and importantly, there was a tangible strategic connection to be made both within the town itself and the wider region.

"That is the key thing with the Darlington TIP," he says. "It's joined together geographically, and strategically as well. It really does fit with the Town Centre strategy, the Local Plan and the Tees Valley strategies."

Darlington also went into the process of developing their TIP with a strong Town Deal Board made up of people across the public and private sectors within their communities.

"We think we've pulled together a really robust, but extremely vigorous Town Deal Board," says Mark Ladyman, Assistant Director of Economic Growth.

"We felt that they were the real game changers in the town and people who were very representative."

Establishing a clear, unique vision and imagining the town experience for visitors of the future

That kernel of an idea was an initial focus on 'gateways'. Darlington's TIP is in part inspired by an imagined journey a visitor might make through the town, connecting the two stations via a route through the town centre. First, a sense of arrival and intent at the main station, before encountering a 'pearl string' of heritage, independent retail, culture and learning through the town centre, then up into the Railway Heritage Quarter.

This notion of a string of pearls was one image that helped the team to articulate a joined-up plan for Darlington. Another was the town vision created by the Town Deal Board. Developing the vision was an important milestone in the journey of progressing the TIP.

Darlington's Towns Fund Vision:

Through targeted capital investment and by taking advantage of our unique passenger railway heritage and growth potential, we will ensure that Darlington has a strong economic and sustainable future which builds on its sense of place and offers opportunities for all.

"We spent a lot of time on the vision," says Chris Mains. He recognises that one of the challenges with writing a vision is that the visionary aspects can often get watered down until you end up with something that's too generic. In responding to feedback with new vigour, the team refocused on what it is that makes Darlington unique.

Darlington's vision makes reference to their history and heritage, whilst placing economic growth at the centre of sustainable future development for all.

"We've got to use what we've got as a springboard for economic growth. Which is what this is all about. It's about building on what's here and taking it forward," Chris Mains.



DARLINGTON

A TOWN INVESTMENT PLAN THAT HAS LIFTED SPIRITS

Front of mind for the Darlington team has been how to ensure that the town remains rooted in its rich history but is able to adapt to be fit for the future.

A successful TIP and excitement building as Darlington takes the first steps towards a bright future

Darlington's high-yielding approach ensured that their TIP sought to enhance and add value to existing projects, foreground the town's unique history and identity and focused on matching potential future jobs with local skills provision.

Their TIP includes a diverse range of projects. These include the regeneration of Skinnergate and the Yards, the historic heart of the town, encouraging people back into the town centre to live and enjoy themselves. Another project is the development of a specialist T-Levels teaching space that will provide the new accreditations linking learning with industry experience within purpose-built facilities. Additionally, there will be a contribution to the Railway Heritage Quarter, a celebration of Darlington's role as the birthplace of modern passenger railway.

"As a team, as a council and also as a Town Deal Board, we pulled something together which has been successful" says Heather. "In these very difficult times, we need some positivity. We still do have problems. But, I think it's lifted the spirits of everybody and I think we've just got to build on that."



Darlington Clock Tower, 2019 © Darlington Borough Council

This story was written from a conversation with Heather Scott, Leader of Darlington Borough Council, Mark Ladyman, Assistant Director of Economic Development; Chris Mains Towns Fund Programme Manager for Darlington Borough Council and Chris Lloyd, journalist and historian.

Darlington is one of 101 places invited by the government to develop Town Deal proposals to deliver long-term economic recovery, clean growth, jobs and prosperity as part of the £3.6 billion Towns Fund.

Darlington submitted a successful Town Investment Plan and secured a Town Deal of up to £22.3 million in October 2020. Darlington is currently developing business cases to take forward its Town Deal proposals.



GLASTONBURY

BRINGING AN ANCIENT FESTIVAL INTO THE DIGITAL AGE

GLASTONBURY BRINGING AN ANCIENT FESTIVAL INTO THE DIGITAL AGE

Julie Reader-Sullivan, Group Manager – Growth and Planning at Mendip District Council and the Glastonbury Town Deal Board show how starting small and working together can galvanize a town and improve engagement.

Summer solstice at Glastonbury Tor

At 4.00am on 21 June 2020, Julie Reader-Sullivan clambered up a steep hill in the dark.

Accompanied by the High Priestess from Glastonbury's goddess community, and with multiple mobile phones as hotspot backup, they marked the dawning of a new day with the first virtual summer solstice event held at Glastonbury Tor.

It was a notable achievement to overcome connectivity issues in a remote site of ancient pilgrimage and live stream the sunrise. More significantly, the moment represented collaborative ways of working that are now galvanising the town around a shared vision for their Town Deal.

Summer solstice occurs annually between 20-21 June in the Northern Hemisphere. It marks the beginning of summer and is the day the sun traces the longest path through the sky, an occasion that has been celebrated in many different cultures for centuries.

The event in Glastonbury brings crowds of people seeking spiritual enrichment or to experience the many sites of heritage, myth and worship such as Glastonbury Abbey, the Tor or the Chalice Well and Gardens.

Early impact of the Town Deal Board

Julie Reader-Sullivan joined Mendip District Council in May 2019 and one of her points of focus has been the development of the tourism strategy. With a background in developing businesses in the private sector, Julie's ethos is rooted in collaborative working. Her role is about supporting growth for the whole district. "And you only do that if you work together," she says.

In November 2019, Glastonbury was selected to be part of the Towns Fund programme. Although the Town Deal Board had formed in early 2020, they had not had an opportunity to meet in person before the Covid-19 crisis began in March.

With the pandemic forcing people to keep a safe distance, there were clear indications that the summer solstice celebrations in the town would have to be different. Glastonbury Town Council shared their concerns with Julie about the potential safety risks to locals and visitors gathering at the Tor.

"It would have been wrong to do nothing, but it would have equally been wrong to say 'come to Glastonbury, we're open'."

The approaching summer solstice presented a clearly defined project that allowed the Town Deal Board to test a new way of working and prove they could deliver.

"I think that's where the Town Deal actually had a big impact. We all have to work collaboratively. So this was a really good opportunity to try it out. No one group could have made this happen."

Glastonbury Safer Summer Solstice campaign

The Glastonbury Safer Summer Solstice campaign spread the crucial 'stay away, stay safe' messaging, while also promoting a new online offering. The virtual solstice event included a live video stream of the sunrise, a multi-faith ceremony, a Salutation to the Dawn and a Ceremony of Light with the High Priestess from the goddess community, as well as yoga, walks and activities for children.



GLASTONBURY BRINGING AN ANCIENT FESTIVAL INTO THE DIGITAL AGE

Julie saw an opportunity to continue to bring trade to local businesses following on from conversations already started through her work in developing the tourism strategy. A public Facebook store, the 'Glastonbury Summer Solstice Tent', promoted Glastonbury-based businesses selling items such as stained glass, candles and jewellery, attracting 1,488 members.

Forging relationships with collaborative working

The collaboration connected Glastonbury Town Deal Board with people and organisations throughout the region, building relationships that will be central to the success of a Town Deal for Glastonbury.

It was a chance to build on existing relationships and forge new ones between Mendip District Council, Glastonbury Town Council, Avon and Somerset Police and the National Trust. Relationships were also strengthened by the Glaston Centre and Glastonbury Tourist Information Centre coming together with members of the local goddess community, multi-faith communities, local businesses and volunteers. These different groups were able to steer and support a shared goal of a safe summer solstice event that would benefit all.

Live streaming from the Glastonbury Information Centre Facebook page established relationships with visitors for future communications. In the week running up to and including the event, the Glastonbury Information Centre had a reach of 83,425 and 36,968 video views. The live stream of the sunrise and ceremony received 10,500 views and 400 comments from people all over the world, including Canada, North America, South America and Australia.



Glastonbury multi-faith summer solstice ceremony 2020 © Mendip District Council



GLASTONBURY BRINGING AN ANCIENT FESTIVAL INTO THE DIGITAL AGE

The power in communication

While working in this way undoubtedly enabled Julie and the team to achieve something remarkable, it did not come without challenges. Julie recognises that working collaboratively and bringing different groups together is ultimately about communication and overcoming misconceptions. For Julie, the answer is clear: a shared story that everyone can get behind.

Glastonbury Town Deal Board has been developing a vision for the town. Following on from the positive energy created from the solstice event, they have received lots of feedback on future development plans from communities that they are not always able to reach.

The shared vision for Glastonbury:

Glastonbury will be a sustainable, prosperous modern town and global tourist centre drawing on its rural landscape, history and unique legacy.

Glastonbury's first virtual summer solstice event provided an important opportunity for the town to come together around a shared project, test and achieve something of real value within a short space of time. It has opened up channels of communications and built relationships within the Town Deal Board and across the town's many communities. It also allowed the town to experience its vision in action, not just on paper.

"It's about breaking down those barriers and that is through communication and working together."



© Mendip District Council

This story was written from a conversation with Julie Reader-Sullivan, Group Manager – Growth and Planning at Mendip District Council.

Glastonbury is one of 101 places invited by the government to develop Town Deal proposals to deliver long-term economic recovery, clean growth, jobs and prosperity as part of the £3.6 billion Towns Fund.

Glastonbury has submitted its Town Investment Plan and the government is in the process of assessing the Town Deal proposals. The outcome of this assessment will be confirmed in due course.



BLACKPOOL

EMBEDDING PARTNERSHIPS AND CHANGING PERCEPTIONS

○ BLACKPOOL EMBEDDING PARTNERSHIPS AND CHANGING PERCEPTIONS

Blackpool has held the crown for this country's leading seaside resort for almost 150 years. By the mid-1800s it was a popular health resort. Blackpool's first illuminations, unveiled in 1879, established the town as the home of visitor attractions, British seaside glitz and frivolous fun. Like seaside resorts across the country, it was hit by the advance of cheap international air travel in the 1970s. Yet Blackpool has held onto its status as an iconic holiday destination. It has "brand awareness to die for" according to Nick Gerrard, Growth and Prosperity Programme Director at Blackpool Council.

Coupled with tremendous highs, the town has experienced significant social challenges, owing in part to the seasonal availability of employment and more transient populations. Before the impact of Covid-19 on the tourism and health and social work sectors in Blackpool had been counted, the town's unemployment rate was already almost double the national average at 6.3%, rising to over 20% in some of the most deprived areas of the town.

Investors need to see more than frivolous fun and hardship

The images of leisure and fun on the one hand and of deprivation and multi-generational hardship on the other, have dominated perceptions of Blackpool's identity in recent times. This image problem has made it difficult for businesses to see Blackpool as a serious option for investment.

A well-connected, ambitious and successful Towns Fund bid has enabled Blackpool to put vital schemes into action that will unlock an expansive programme of regeneration funded by both the private and public sectors. Equally, an ongoing campaign to highlight the strengths of the town in sectors such as aerospace and digital connectivity is beginning to write a new story for the town and shift perceptions.

When Nick took up his post at Blackpool Council in 2016, he too came with some prejudice about the place. "I've been involved in economic development and regeneration all my career and I shared many of the negative perceptions of Blackpool. I came here particularly passionate about changing those to reflect the reality of what is actually going on", he says.

Long-term thinking, an appetite for measured risk taking, and a true ambition for change

"Regeneration is hard work and schemes often take quite a long while before the full benefits are realised" Nick says, recognising that efforts to change the tide towards a more prosperous future for Blackpool have been mounting for a number of years.

Prince of Wales charity Business in the Community (BitC) have been working alongside the Council for the last four years to develop ambitious plans for the future of Blackpool. This has included establishing the Blackpool Pride of Place Partnership in 2017 and beginning to build long-term public and private partnerships to deliver the change needed in the town. Additionally, the 2018 Blackpool Town Prospectus sets out multi-generational thinking and reflects the long-term nature of regeneration, with an ambitious 2030 vision. It also commits to changing perceptions of the place by actively promoting facts around the town's hidden strengths and assets.

Changing perceptions with new stories

"People have a very fixed idea as to what Blackpool is or isn't," says Paul Smith, Chair of Blackpool Town Deal Board.

"Last year the high-speed fibre optic transatlantic cable landed in Blackpool, and a third of the world's internet traffic will go between New York through Blackpool and on to Scandinavia. People just dismissed it and said that can't be right! But once you start explaining this to potential investors, the scales fall from their eyes, and they can see a wholly different narrative."



BLACKPOOL EMBEDDING PARTNERSHIPS AND CHANGING PERCEPTIONS

Cross-sector, collaborative working has been integral to Blackpool's Town Deal Board. Paul says that when establishing the Town Deal Board there was, "this natural way of working with business, central and local government and the community. The investors in the town, the main businesses, the college and the football club, they're all represented. So that partnership way of working was ingrained into Blackpool."

Building relationships that last around a shared vision

Again, thinking of the long term, Paul recognises the importance of a strong and diverse board and says, "Town Deal Boards and the Towns Fund programme will go on for years. Central government wants confidence that the Board and the people in the place will deliver and be reliable partners."

Nick, his team at Blackpool Council and partners across the Town Deal Board are steadily building towards their shared vision of Blackpool.

Importantly, they are committed to sharing new stories of what Blackpool is today - creative, enterprising, and full of potential - as a means to reaching their vision for the future.

"I think what distinguishes the good investment plans from the not so good are a true vision and a strategy where the projects are joined together", says Paul. Blackpool has proven this through their Prospectus. "The Towns Fund met with our ambition" says Nick, and it is "a key means of delivering major elements" of what they hope Blackpool will become known for, generations from now.



Blackpool Central masterplan simulation 2020 © Blackpool Council

This story was written from a conversation with Nick Gerrard, Growth and Prosperity Programme Director at Blackpool Council and Paul Smith of Business in the Community, Chair of Blackpool Town Deal Board.

Blackpool is one of 101 places invited by the government to develop Town Deal proposals to deliver long-term economic recovery, clean growth, jobs and prosperity as part of the £3.6 billion Towns Fund.

Blackpool submitted a successful Town Investment Plan and secured a Town Deal of up to £39.5 million in October 2020. Blackpool is currently developing business cases to take forward its Town Deal proposals.



STAVELEY

**RESTORING A LOCAL PIECE OF RAILWAY HERITAGE
FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS**

STAVELEY RESTORING A LOCAL PIECE OF RAILWAY HERITAGE FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS

From near demolition to DRIVe innovation centre, how one man saved a unique piece of railway history and now has sights on the future of the industry.

Mervyn Allcock has lived in the Staveley area all his life. Like many of the working families in the area in the 1960s and 70s, his father and brother were coal miners. Mervyn grew up in Inkersall, less than a mile away from the railway roundhouse at Barrow Hill, a large building with a turntable and 24 tracks, resembling a clock face.

“I remember coming here many times with friends, sneaking around and taking down the train numbers. I was very fond of the building.”

The Barrow Hill Railway Depot was built in 1870 by the Midland Railway Company for the maintenance of steam locomotives and is a unique example of Victorian railway architecture. The roundhouse operated as a steam depot until 1965 when diesel took over the movement of coal trains, continuing as a diesel depot until 1991.

With an ambition for the future of Staveley and the surrounding area, Mervyn now wants to restore the energy and bustle of activity he knew as a child and he's once again looking to the railway for inspiration.

The preservation of railway history

In his early 20s, Mervyn read a story in the paper that stated plans to demolish the last operational railway roundhouse in Great Britain. He knew instantly it was the roundhouse at Barrow Hill, his childhood playground. And so began a pursuit to save this local historic building.

“It's very difficult to explain why a 22-year-old had such a wild idea. I wanted to do something with the building, making my mark on railway heritage and our local history. So I decided to try and save the building from demolition.”

The first challenge was to stop the building being razed to the ground. Mervyn dedicated the next two years to raising awareness of the roundhouse with Chesterfield Council while striving to get a preservation order placed on it.

One early breakthrough came in 1996 when Mervyn secured £350,000 to restore the buildings that had been heavily vandalised. The funding was a joint effort from European funding, Chesterfield Borough Council, Derbyshire County Council and the community arm of what was then British Rail.

By 1998 the rebuilding works were complete, and Mervyn and his team celebrated saving the country's last operational roundhouse with a steam open day, attracting hundreds of people. Since then the Barrow Hill Roundhouse Railway Centre has grown into a multiuse visitor attraction, known around the world.

A piece of history at the heart of the community

Today, iconic trains from the original roundhouse depot remain at the heart of the project. Mervyn has also opened this historic railway building to live music and beer festivals. With performing stars such as Jools Holland and Rick Wakeman, the centre has had a significant impact on the Staveley economy, with visitors staying and spending locally.

“I think I've just learned lots about how valuable the community and the people locally can be if they're given an opportunity, I haven't done it all on my own. There's been lots of individuals who have made a massive contribution alongside me.”



STAVELEY RESTORING A LOCAL PIECE OF RAILWAY HERITAGE FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS

The future of rail innovation through DRIIVe

The proposed Rail Sector Innovation, Research and Training Centre at Barrow Hill, or DRIIVe centre as it's known locally, would provide training for the next generation in the skills and knowledge for future railway industries, whilst innovating with materials, track and vehicle usage.

The DRIIVe project brings together partner organisations across the Staveley region including the University of Derby, Chesterfield College, Barrow Hill Engine Shed Society, Chesterfield Borough Council and Talgo, a large Original Equipment Manufacturer (OEM) of railway rolling stock.

Pride in the community

Ivan Fomin, Chair of Staveley's Town Deal Board recognises that the town is constantly changing and needs to evolve over time.

Both Ivan and Mervyn are committed to bringing back a sense of pride within the community, and hope the Staveley Town Deal will bring prosperity to the town and its residents.

While accepting an honorary master's degree from the University of Derby, Mervyn's message to anyone who wants to make a difference to their local place is clear.

"You must never, ever give up. If you have a dream or a vision of something you think will make a difference. Then, first of all, you must never give up."



Mervyn Allcock at the Barrow Hill Roundhouse 2020 © Courtesy of Mervyn Allcock

This story was written from a conversation with Mervyn Allcock, General Manager of the Barrow Hill Roundhouse.

Staveley is one of 101 places invited by the government to develop proposals for a Town Deal to deliver long-term economic recovery, clean growth, jobs and prosperity as part of the £3.6 billion Towns Fund.

Staveley has submitted its Town Investment Plan and the government is in the process of assessing the Town Deal proposals. The outcome of this assessment will be confirmed in due course.



PRESTON

**MECHANISMS FOR CHANGE AND THE LINK BETWEEN
PERSONAL WELLBEING AND ECONOMY**

PRESTON MECHANISMS FOR CHANGE AND THE LINK BETWEEN PERSONAL WELLBEING AND ECONOMY

Working in harmony with the city; centering health and wellbeing in plans to revive Preston's local economy

Robert Binns is a successful businessman, born and raised in Preston. He grew up within the multicultural West Indian and Asian communities of the city and went on to forge a career in the aerospace industry that makes up a large part of Preston's local economy.

Today, Robert owns a number of businesses including Cotton Court, a renovated cotton mill which he has developed into a contemporary office and meeting space. Robert is passionate about supporting the next generation of graduates, start-ups and entrepreneurs and understands that his own ability to thrive is closely linked to the fortunes of his city.

"I'm quite entrenched in a lot of what goes on" he says. "Not just from a passionate perspective but from an economic perspective as a symbiotic relationship. If the city does well, I do well financially, and also the rest of my family and people I've grown up with."

Preston's Town Deal Board was formed out of the Preston Partnership, a business-led network of people with a vested interest in Preston city centre, supported by the city council. The partnership steers a more positive story for the town in the face of "press and other business things being littered with negativity," says Robert. The partnership is also a means of sharing information between the city and its business community. An outspoken and active member of the Preston Partnership, Robert was invited to join the Town Deal Board in January 2020.

At the first board meeting, nobody held back. As conversations about the future of Preston unfolded it became clear that everyone was there with a strong sense of purpose.

"The great thing about it is that everyone does really champion what they believe in and where they're coming from" says Robert.

Despite being driven by a range of priorities, from education to infrastructure or enterprise, there were lots of common interests amongst the Board. Discussions about the centrality of health and wellbeing in Preston ignited new ways of thinking about the future of the city.

"People generally separate the two" said Robert. "They look at economics or they'll look at health and wellbeing; they actually don't realise that the two are married together". This idea united the Board in their thinking about the future of Preston.

Robert acknowledges that in the past there has at times been a disconnect between schemes being proposed and what is viable from the council perspective. Yet, "operating in partnership with the local government, it allows you to get to where you want to get to, without anybody being put out," because plans are developed in dialogue.

Drawing in expertise, networks and communities

"Robert believes the selection of people to make up the Town Deal Board has been a key part of its dynamism. Everyone on the Board has a vested interest in the city and strong-willed enough to share points of view, but not so stubborn as to lose sight of the bigger picture for Preston.



PRESTON MECHANISMS FOR CHANGE AND THE LINK BETWEEN PERSONAL WELLBEING AND ECONOMY

“Where I grew up it was predominantly West Indian and Asian communities,” Robert explains. “I’m looking at making sure that the projects actually touch all of those communities as well, and that those communities aren’t excluded from them.”

With Robert’s experience in enterprise, and commitment to the local community, he advocates strongly for entrepreneurship so all parts of society benefit from the plans. In particular, he would like to see Preston better able to retain its graduate talent with viable opportunities encouraging them to keep a presence in the city.

While the Town Deal Board has a good representation of different communities including those with disabilities and from faith groups across the city, the members have also been able to draw in their wider networks and connections so that if the knowledge or experience wasn’t yet in the room, it was within reach.

“I wouldn’t say that the Board had the total skill-set to develop everything,” Robert says. “But what the Board did have is the contacts externally to reach out and bring in whatever skills and information, and then feed back in. I think that’s the beauty of it”. These feedback channels allowed the Board to test ideas with their communities and loop suggestions back in.



Robert Binns at Cotton Court Business Centre, 2020 © Courtesy of Robert Binns



PRESTON MECHANISMS FOR CHANGE AND THE LINK BETWEEN PERSONAL WELLBEING AND ECONOMY

A mechanism for community-led change and a Preston that supports everyone's wellbeing

While Robert is optimistic that the capital investment from the Towns Fund will inspire hope and confidence across Preston, he is looking at the experience of the Town Deal Board as a template to address other issues within the city. "I think that's probably one of the most underestimated elements of this exercise, the legacy of not just the projects, but of the mechanism in forming the projects."

Robert is driven to keep Preston moving toward a future that he hopes will see better health and wellbeing among all of the city's residents, who are in turn able to take an active role in the local economy.

The signs of success? They will be visible in the communities he grew up in. "If you understand a place and understand people you don't need to look at a chart" he says. "You can just look at how people are acting: are people exercising, are they smoking less, are they drinking less. You can tell when you see that people from more deprived, challenging areas are stepping forward and moving forward. Now that's an easy sign to say that other things are working."

He is also adamant that just because a person isn't born with opportunity, it shouldn't mean they don't seek opportunity. Robert is committed to helping his city and his community reach their potential, together.



Courtesy of Preston Partnership Town Investment Plan

This story was written from a conversation with Robert Binns, Entrepreneur; Group CEO, Cotton Court Business Centre; and Preston Town Deal Board member.

Preston is one of 101 places invited by the government to develop Town Deal proposals to deliver long-term economic recovery, clean growth, jobs and prosperity as part of the £3.6 billion Towns Fund.

Preston submitted a successful Town Investment Plan and secured a Town Deal of up to £19.9 million in March 2021. Preston is currently developing business cases to take forward its Town Deal proposals.



BOSTON

NEW POSSIBILITIES AND A TOWN FOR EVERYONE

BOSTON

NEW POSSIBILITIES AND A TOWN FOR EVERYONE

There is a palpable sense of optimism and possibility among the team responsible for delivering the Town Deal for Boston.

“Get out there, speak to people and start connecting people; but stop thinking like a traditional local authority,” says Michelle Sacks in advice to other towns who want to galvanise the opportunities presented by the Towns Fund programme.

This is exactly what Michelle and her team at Boston Borough Council and East Lindsey District Council are doing. Identifying influential Board members was a strategic process that has ignited dynamic new relationships across the borough. These connections have already enabled Boston to attract significant inward investment from food manufacturers Plant & Bean Ltd (Plant and Bean) who are now in the process of relocating to the town and make Boston home to Europe’s largest meat-free factory. Key players in the education sector have also benefited from understanding and aligning their aims, and discussions among Board members have opened up the possibility of expanding the local port.

Building trust with those left behind

Between 2001 and 2017 Boston’s population grew 22 per cent due to inward migration particularly from Eastern European countries. However, there is an outward migration of young people and Boston is in the bottom 30 per cent of neighbourhoods in England when it comes to employment outcomes¹. Prior to Covid-19, of those 16-24 year-olds who stay, 7 per cent claimed out of work benefits, compared to a national figure of less than 2 per cent².

Many of Boston’s businesses had been operating quite separately and Clive Gibbon, Economic Development Manager at Boston Council, has been focused on strengthening relationships and “nurturing business confidence, for businesses to actually trust us, fully understand the support we can give and create an environment where businesses can flourish”, he says.

¹Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government - The English Indices of Deprivation 2019 (IoD2019) – Domains of Deprivation

²Office for National Statistics - Claimant count by sex and age – February 2020

Michelle acknowledges the challenges faced by the town. “We’ve been selected because of the levelling up agenda,” she says. “We were keen to ensure that our Towns Fund bid started to address Boston’s challenges in a clear, coherent and joined up way through consultation with our residents and businesses.”

New connections sparking new ideas

In Boston, the Towns Fund programme has been harnessed as a springboard to build confidence, establish authentic networks and raise the profile of Boston nationally and internationally. While generating proposals for their Town Investment Plan (TIP), the newly connected members of the Town Deal Board started to explore the potential of expanding the town’s port. Michelle hopes the proposed extension will place Boston at the centre of Lincolnshire plc - and UK plc - in post-Brexit Britain in years to come, an advantage that just wasn’t on the table before the Town Deal Board began to share ideas.

“I can categorically say, had we not had the Town Deal platform that brought those people together, we would not be sitting here today, being able to talk about the Port of Boston Gateway to Growth as our project, which started off as a concept from those people around the town’s board table,” says Michelle.

Joining up the education sector for learners of all ages

Strengthening relationships across all levels of the education sector in Boston has been another early success resulting from connections nurtured within the Town Deal Board. “In the past there was competition within the education system”, says Clive, with institutions vying to attract sixth formers. By collaborating on the Town Deal Board, the sector is now working towards shared aims, with a better understanding of what each educational institution offers. As a result, the University of Lincoln has set up an office within Boston College for the first time. The ‘productivity hub’ for business and education will enable them to work together to signpost learners to the best provision for them at a time when acquiring new skills has become crucial for all age groups.



BOSTON NEW POSSIBILITIES AND A TOWN FOR EVERYONE

A seamless introduction to Boston securing the relocation of Plant and Bean

Plant and Bean's new site in Boston will eventually employ 500 people and the growing skills offer was an important part of attracting the company to the town. When Plant and Bean visited Boston over the summer of 2020 Clive and Michelle were able to confidently demonstrate the breadth of the town's offer by drawing on the Town Deal Board network. They introduced the Principal from Boston College to discuss skills and enterprise, and the Dean of Holbeach Campus, part of the University of Lincoln and a leading institution in food, technology and design (robotics and food tech). They are also connecting Plant and Bean to local growers which are an important part of the company's supply chain and were able to talk to the Director of Port of Boston about the opportunities to import and export from Boston, another central part of their operation.

"Those parties are on our Town Deal Board, and because they have all been involved in the project development that went into the TIP, they share that collective ambition for the place, for the people, and to attract those inward investments," says Michelle.

"We could bring those partners who were then able to talk authoritatively about their service areas, their industry, and what they could do to support that growth and expansion, and that was important to Plant and Bean in terms of where they located."

A two-way conversation and a town for everybody

"It's not just about a planning process. It's about the skills agenda, it's about creating the link with our young people and it's about inclusive growth. Growth and prosperity are for all of our residents, and all of our partners, not just a select few," says Michelle.



St Botolphs bridge, Boston 2019 © Courtesy of Boston Borough Council



BOSTON NEW POSSIBILITIES AND A TOWN FOR EVERYONE

Michelle and her team are committed to bringing the people of Boston along for the journey, engaging consistently, and shaping the TIP based on the feedback coming in. A cornerstone of their commitment to transparency and dialogue is the Boston Town Deal website. This provides a central hub for progress updates, key documents, blogs and videos, and has proved popular – a video on Boston’s connection to the Mayflower ship and its historic voyage has received 100,000 views and over 260 comments to date. The team has also mobilised social media as an engagement tool, communicating with people through the channels they use regularly and inviting them to join conversation.

“We’re being open and transparent, which is really important. This comes with governance, but sometimes governance is dry, and actually what you want is your community to be engaged,” Michelle says.

Yet Michelle recognises that “if there’s already a sense within your community of being forgotten and left behind, it’s hard to generate engagement. So, for us it’s really important that we maintain that dialogue. It’s a real bottom up approach and a two-way conversation. We want to hear and have the feedback.”

Having secured a successful Town Deal of up to £21.9 million in March 2021, the Boston Town Deal Board is continuing conversations with communities of residents, businesses, educators and potential investors, whilst they stride towards a confident and connected future for the town.



Courtesy of Boston Borough Council Town Investment Plan

This story was written from a conversation with Michelle Sacks, Joint Deputy Chief Executive (Place), Boston Borough Council and East Lindsey District Council and Clive Gibbon, Economic Development Manager at Boston Borough Council.

Boston is one of 101 places invited by the government to develop Town Deal proposals to deliver long-term economic recovery, clean growth, jobs and prosperity as part of the £3.6 billion Towns Fund.

Boston secured a Town Deal of up to £21.9 million in March 2021. Boston is currently developing business cases to take forward its Town Deal proposals.



NEWARK

AMBITIOUS FUTURES FOR THE TOWN'S YOUNG PEOPLE

NEWARK

AMBITIOUS FUTURES FOR THE TOWN'S YOUNG PEOPLE

“If children are given opportunities to shape the future of where they live they are more likely to raise their own families there.”

Jay Charles is 13 and attends Newark Academy. In his entry to the Future Newark writing competition (which sought views from young people to inform Newark's Town Investment Plan), Jay argued passionately for action on climate change and the need for us all to play our part, giving mother nature a chance to live on.

Other competition entrants shared Jay's view that young people are the future of Newark and the more they are listened to, the more likely they are to see a future for themselves in the town.

“Why is the future important?”

Picking up on this theme, Newark Towns Fund Board Co-Chair, Tom Cartledge, asked fellow Board members to reflect deeply on the 'why?' of Newark's Town Investment Plan. For Tom, the CEO of Handley House, a Newark-based family business and global firm of built environment design specialists, Newark's Town Investment Plan is as much about levelling up within Newark itself, as competing with other parts of the country.

“Everybody in our town deserves the opportunity to be part of a successful community,” he says. Like Jay, Tom sees Newark's children as the town's future and therefore central to understanding and maximising opportunities.

“If our plans are for 3, 5, 10 and 20 years' time, and we're asking people to buy into our vision, the people we want to talk to are the kids who are going to be the town of the future - particularly in a place like ours where there are challenges around social mobility,” says Tom.

Challenging multi-generational trends

Social mobility and education are recognised as key challenges in Newark's Town Investment Plan. The town is amongst the least socially mobile places in Great Britain, while achievement in local secondary schools is below average. Over 1,000 children from Newark leave the town each day for education, with many subsequently moving away permanently for higher education and employment opportunities.

As the latest generation of a family that's always lived in the Newark area, Tom Cartledge bucked this trend but recognises the challenge. “My mum will always tell you that I spent my whole life saying that I'd never live around Newark but actually it's a great town. The challenge we had was limited job opportunities. Many of my friends from school left and have not come back.”

Tom recognises his story is an exception and, had he not had a family business to return to, he may have followed a different path. However, with colleagues on the Town Deal Board, Tom is committed to giving others the opportunity to stay and be successful by offering young people opportunities to thrive in the town and promoting positive local role models for them to aspire to.

Creating new pathways

Newark's Town Investment Plan emphasises a range of learning routes to good quality local employment. There is a commitment to expand vocational and non-vocational pathways, building links between business and education and securing a higher education presence in the town. This includes a move to bring in T Level engineering qualifications that build on Newark's industrial heritage, strengthening 'on-the-job' training provision in the area for future opportunities linked to Ministry of Defence bases in nearby Lincolnshire. The International Air & Space Training Institute (IASTI), led by Lincoln College Group and Aviation 360, will blend education with practical experience to establish a post-16 pathway to aviation and space industries. The scheme will welcome its first intake of students in September 2021.



NEWARK AMBITIOUS FUTURES FOR THE TOWN'S YOUNG PEOPLE

For Tom and the Town Deal Board, creating a long-term plan for Newark which focuses on supporting young people means that “when they come to those decisions at 16, 17 or 18 years old about where they’re going to go for the next level of learning they’ve already bought into the idea that this Town can provide for them and their families, the money, education, opportunities and vocations they need.”

Listening to the voices of young people

Tom is aware that it would have been easy for the Town Deal Board to seek views from the usual demographic groups, making assumptions about what younger generations wanted from the future of Newark. He is equally clear that this would not have surfaced the diversity of ideas generated by the Future Newark competition.

For his part, Jay is open to staying in Newark so long as “it stays safe, and has an eco-friendly approach to things.” Others, like Jay’s fellow competition winner, Harrison, remain concerned about a lack of job opportunities in the area. “I’m not saying they’re bad jobs or anything but there’s just more opportunities elsewhere,” he says, suggesting Tom and his Town Deal Board colleagues are on the right track in focusing on improving pathways to work.

What all competition winners and runners-up agree on is that children should be involved more in shaping the future of their towns because, in the words of Katherine from Highfields School, “children have brilliant ideas”, but according to another winner, Elliot, from Newark Academy, they “don’t always get listened to.”

By listening to young people’s ideas, nurturing their ambitions, and matching those ambitions with the right access to skills, training and employment in the town, Tom and the Town Deal Board aim to harness the creativity and passion of Newark’s young people to help shape a future that delivers on their ambitions



Jay Charles, Newark Academy Student © Courtesy of the Charles Family

This story was written from conversations with Tom Cartledge, Co-Chair of Newark Town Deal Board and CEO of Handley House; Jay Charles, Newark Academy; Elliot Rapley-Patrick, Barnby Road Academy; Harrison Fletcher, Newark Academy and Katherine Forgione, Highfields School.

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LOWESTOFT

CULTURE, HERITAGE AND FUTURE BELONGING

LOWESTOFT CULTURE, HERITAGE AND FUTURE BELONGING

Creativity is rising in Lowestoft as the people behind the drive to embed culture at the heart of the Town Investment Plan are brimming with positivity and a deeply collaborative spirit. Genevieve Christie, founder of the First Light Festival; Phil Aves, relationship manager at Lowestoft Rising; and young filmmaker Joshua Freemantle have each been actively engaging with East Suffolk District Council to make the case for creativity in the Town and all their efforts are beginning to flourish.

“There’s been this mushrooming,” says Genevieve. “We’ve lit the touchpaper and you just see things starting to happen.”

Recognition for a council willing to take a risk on culture

In March 2021 Lowestoft’s regeneration team was nominated for Improvement and Efficiency Social Enterprise’s (IESE) Public Sector Transformation Awards in recognition of the team’s innovative approach to regeneration and asset management and for its placemaking, branding and community involvement work to develop the Town Investment Plan.

Gabriella Fox, Regeneration Project Officer at East Suffolk District Council, is part of the innovative team placing culture at the centre of plans for the future of Lowestoft. “We are a highly deprived area, falling within the 10 per cent most deprived neighbourhoods in England, so being able to provide culture on our doorstep - make it accessible and completely free, like we did with the First Light Festival - is really important,” she says.

Recognising the transformative role of culture and heritage in placemaking, Lowestoft’s regeneration team has been steadily nurturing creative sector talent and skills in the Town for several years, establishing the idea that culture can be created by and for everyone.

Lowestoft’s newly adopted cultural strategy provides the foundation for its Town Investment Plan (TIP) which secured up to £24.9 million investment from government in March 2021. “Celebrating our culture and heritage” is one of five key themes that run through the TIP, as Lowestoft takes strides to regenerate and reimagine the Town for the future.

Lowestoft’s TIP develops from an inclusive, bottom-up approach to culture and heritage that builds on the momentum ignited by Genevieve Christie, Phil Aves, Joshua Freemantle, among many in the Town’s creative community, each with an important story to tell.

Genevieve Christie, Founder of First Light Festival and cultural instigator

When Genevieve first came to the Lowestoft area, she was struck by what she saw as an inequality of opportunity for people to engage with high quality arts and culture.

“There was huge untapped potential. It was what wasn’t happening in the schools,” she says. “These children were not getting the opportunities that other children were getting, and that was cascading through the community.”

Today, Lowestoft is home to a blossoming creative sector and Genevieve has led a number of projects in the Town including the eclectic FlipSide Festival; Making Waves Together - an ambitious multi-partner programme initiated in 2017 to boost the culture offer in Lowestoft and neighbouring Great Yarmouth; and the First Light Festival - a multi-arts celebration of Lowestoft’s unique position as Britain’s most easterly town launched in 2019.

Over time Genevieve has built and nurtured deeper connections with culture and heritage among the communities she has worked with in Lowestoft. Her commitment to culture has seen her invite people in Lowestoft to reconnect with the Town’s story and to generate a new sense of belonging. The First Light Festival proved there is an appetite for more cultural activity in the Town and played a role in laying the groundwork for a TIP that has been able to confidently focus on arts, culture and heritage for the community.



LOWESTOFT CULTURE, HERITAGE AND FUTURE BELONGING

“Culture is a living thing,” says Genevieve. “Everything around us is to do with our culture, whether it’s the 1960s shop or an Old Town Hall that’s got a stained-glass window, it’s all part of what makes a town mean something. An understanding of the heritage of a place enables you to connect to it, even if you weren’t brought up there or don’t have family there - and engenders a sense of belonging. It’s giving people the opportunity to talk about a place to reflect on it, to exchange ideas about it, and to learn to value it.”

Phil Aves, on reaching communities by engaging children and young people

Another key figure in Lowestoft’s journey to strengthening the role of culture and heritage in the town is Phil Aves. He is a relationship manager for Lowestoft Rising (a public sector partnership aiming to improve quality of life in the town), a mental health ambassador for Lowestoft and chairs the Local Cultural Education Partnership (LCEP) for Lowestoft and Great Yarmouth. Phil established an LCEP in the Lowestoft region in response to a call from local schools for greater access to arts, culture and heritage.

“It’s 10,000 children across primary schools, high schools, colleges, special schools and nurseries,” he says. “The teachers were saying - we’re culturally void, we’ve been so focused on getting the core subjects better, and in doing so we’ve forgotten about all the culture, the dance and the music.”

By starting with young people Phil believes there is real possibility to reach whole communities.

“I think the hardest thing was engaging the community because we use the term culture - and people think ‘it is not for me’,” says Phil. “It is for you, it’s for everyone, it’s our history. Start with the young people and let it grow from there. Getting in early gives you a whole lifetime of culture and everything else, but it’s also a way of reaching the families, through the children and with a really strong culture of education policy.”



*First Light Festival, Lowestoft
Image on various local news sites, crediting Kate Ellis*



LOWESTOFT CULTURE, HERITAGE AND FUTURE BELONGING

Joshua Freemantle is a young filmmaker changing the story of his town

Joshua Freemantle is a dynamic young filmmaker and producer from Lowestoft and is quickly becoming another important voice for the local creative community.

Joshua is committed to challenging negative perceptions of his town. So much so that in 2019 he went to Phil Aves with the idea to make a documentary that would shine a spotlight on what makes Lowestoft special.

'Life of Lowestoft' was released in September 2020 and uncovers the culture and history of the town. The Life of Lowestoft moniker has now evolved into a podcast series, in which Joshua hosts conversations with local people sharing his passion for all things Lowestoft.

"I'm going to carry on shouting about Lowestoft because there's just so much that young people like me just don't know about".

Despite being born and raised in Lowestoft, before embarking on the 'Life of Lowestoft' project Joshua had very little awareness of the history and heritage of the town. Areas such as Scores - a series of lanes leading from the high street to the beach village, once a bustling hub of Lowestoft's fishing industry - were unknown to him as a young person.

"There's such a hidden gem in the north of Lowestoft. Why did I as a young person never know about the Scores?" he asks. "Making the documentary really opened my eyes and helped me learn about the hidden heritage and history of the town."

Creating a sense of belonging through culture

Lowestoft's proposed Town Deal projects include a large-scale mixed-use development in a designated Cultural Quarter that will upgrade the existing theatre and provide a new arts venue; year-round First Light Festival cultural programming; and conservation-led improvements to the Historic Quarter - including the Scores.

For Genevieve, Phil and Joshua there is a clear role for culture in creating a sense of belonging and connection to Lowestoft, while linking to the past and the future of the town.

This story was written from a conversation with Genevieve Christie, founder of the First Light Festival; Phil Aves, Relationship Manager at Lowestoft Rising; Joshua Freemantle, filmmaker and Development Producer, Sunrise Studios; and Gabriella Fox, Regeneration Project Officer, East Suffolk District Council.

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WOLVERHAMPTON

TRUST AND COMMUNITY IN WEDNESFIELD

WOLVERHAMPTON TRUST AND COMMUNITY IN WEDNESFIELD

Co-delivery and transparency to build back trust

Jay Baso is a business owner in Wednesfield, a historic town north-east of Wolverhampton city centre. He is a spirited and active member of his local community and has been the driving force behind closer collaboration, deeper engagement and a successful co-delivery approach between the business community in Wednesfield and the City of Wolverhampton Council.

Together they have co-delivered the £150k Accelerated Funding Wolverhampton receives as part of the Towns Fund; increased transparency of decision making and built trust between them along the way.

Restoring positivity and prosperity within the community

“There’s three things in life that I always believe in: respect, morals and manners. If you’ve got them all, well, I’ve got both feet in,” he says about his commitment to working with others in the community to make improvements to the town.

Jay has campaigned for investment into Wednesfield for years, so when funds were allocated through Wolverhampton’s Town Deal, Jay seized the opportunity to mobilise his community, create a more positive outlook about the town and rebuild trust with the council. He was set on countering some of the negative views circulating on social media, with the aim of attracting people back to the area and ultimately, attracting further investment.

“When you’re hearing about crime happening on the High Street, it’s scaring people and deterring them from coming back,” says Jay.

Jay grew up in Wednesfield and the High Street and market have been important features of his life in the town. As a child, the fruit-and-veg man would throw Jay an orange every Saturday and he had his first job on the market, sweeping up at the end of the day.

Now, as a local business owner for over 30 years, Jay has taken on the role of bringing the community of traders and business owners together to ensure the area is not left behind.

Kickstarting the conversation

“My role, which I took upon myself really, was to try and build the trust back and get the council involved as well as traders, because us small businesses are a big part of the economy,” Jay says.

Jay first brought the business community together in January 2020, concerned about what he saw circulating on social media and also motivated by the need for investment in the area. Jay and his close team set up the first meeting and Jay paid for the meeting venue and refreshments himself. Jay made sure that the key people were in the room, including councillors across all political parties, the relevant cabinet member, representatives from the city hygiene and transport teams, along with around 40 fellow traders and local business owners. Jane Stevenson, the then newly elected MP, was in attendance and has continued to be involved in the project since.

“By the end, everybody was shaking hands, hugging or talking – you know, even now I’ve got the hairs standing on the back of my neck when I think of it. What a good first meeting, all the characters were there,” recalls Jay.

Investing in relationships across the community

Jay’s ability to build relationships on all levels and his determination to open communication between the traders and the council enabled him to play a pivotal role in the planning and delivery of the Accelerated Funding investment in Wednesfield.

“The relationship has been built up with the council, because I am quite straight talking in a respectful manner... it doesn’t matter if I’m talking to one of the cabinet members of the council or one of the workers, because we’re all human,” he says.



WOLVERHAMPTON TRUST AND COMMUNITY IN WEDNESFIELD

John Roseblade, Head of City Transport, at City of Wolverhampton Council was invited to chair the group that continued from that first meeting and he went on to deliver the Accelerated Funding projects for Wednesfield. By establishing genuine community engagement and involving Jay throughout, trust has been built on both sides.

John says, “Identifying an active member of the community, bringing them into the heart of the project, and being very open and transparent about how the programme was developed and delivered has been key.”

Raising confidence and community pride

Jay sees the £150K in Accelerated Funding as just the beginning of a much bigger jigsaw puzzle to get Wednesfield back on its feet, but hopes to prove the community’s commitment to making that happen.

“The council will look at us and think, actually they’ve worked really hard,” he says.

Jay has made sure that the funding is working hard too. The project includes a new ‘Welcome to Wednesfield’ sign and a sculpture in the roundabout, planters and resin around trees, hanging baskets, cigarette bins, CCTV cameras, new parking and stall awnings. These are all aimed at making the area more welcoming and encouraging a renewed sense of community pride. Since delivering the changes, the market stall take-up has already increased from just two regular traders to being fully booked.

Looking to the future, Jay is seeking to attract further investment into Wednesfield by continuing to build confidence and respect within the community and by working together.

Jay says, “If people respect their village, it filters down to their children and they might not drop litter, they might not drop fag-ends, they might not spray graffiti. So, as a community, that’s what I’m trying to bring together.”



Jay Baso supporting the City of Wolverhampton Shop Local campaign 2021 © courtesy Jay Baso



WOLVERHAMPTON TRUST AND COMMUNITY IN WEDNESFIELD

Success built on the foundations of persistence and compromise

Jay puts his achievements in Wednesfield down to a vital combination of persistence and compromise.

“I’m quite a vocal gentleman. I’m a thorn in people’s side, but I’m a nice thorn ... I’m just persistent, and if some of this gets forgotten about, I’ve taken it upon myself to kindly remind people with a gentle nudge to say ‘come on’. We’ve actually built up a big rapport now with a lot of the council officers.”

While Jay does not shy away from making his voice and voices across his community heard, he also insists on the importance of being open to compromise.

“You’ve got to listen to other people’s views and opinions,” he says.

As Wolverhampton moves through the Towns Fund programme into the business case and implementation stages, these are valuable reflections. The further challenge will be facilitating this level of engagement and co-delivery at scale.

“It’s probably a very nice model in terms of engagement that can then be rolled out to further and larger projects if needed,” says John. “In terms of the pace of engagement itself, regardless of what we delivered, it was very successful in how we have gained and developed the trust of the traders. Will that be scalable? I don’t know. This worked so well because it was a finite number of traders, with one very active individual talking to everybody.”

The start of something bigger

Wolverhampton secured its Town Deal of up to £25m in March 2021. After the Board’s allocation process Wednesfield has been earmarked to receive a further £2.51m Towns Fund investment. This will enable Wednesfield to lay the groundwork to unlock further investment in the area in the future. A first step is £120K allocated to develop a masterplan for the canal towpath and High Street.

Jay’s personal mission is to bring positivity to the village of Wednesfield and with new investment coming into the area there is ample reason to feel positive about the future.

This story was written from conversations with Jay Baso, Business Owner, Elegant Frames and Mirrors and John Roseblade, Head of City Transport, City of Wolverhampton Council.

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In September 2020, the government brought forward £81.5m from the Towns Fund for investment in capital projects that would have an immediate impact known as Accelerated Funding. Wolverhampton received an additional £1m as part of this fund.

Wolverhampton submitted a successful Town Investment Plan and secured a Town Deal of up to £25 million in March 2021. Wolverhampton is currently developing business cases to take forward its Town Deal proposals.



PENZANCE

PUTTING PEOPLE AND PLANET FIRST

PENZANCE

PUTTING PEOPLE AND PLANET FIRST

“I just want to see meaningful action in the place where I live and initiatives that actually are doing something rather than paying lip service,” says Rachel Yates, of Sustainable Penzance.

For the last seven years, Rachel Yates has dedicated her time to inspiring her home town of Penzance to address the climate crisis. Rachel’s community organising enabled Penzance to become UK’s first ‘Plastic Free’ accredited town in 2017, and she has gone on to set up Sustainable Penzance in 2019, a community interest company committed to creating a more sustainable future for the town.

Rachel’s continued engagement with the council, local schools and businesses, and the wider community led her to be invited to join the Town Deal Board for Penzance and her passion for protecting people and planet is at the heart of her work.

“This is my first time sitting on a Board” says Rachel. “It’s been a real eye opener. I’m really pleased that I’ve been asked to do it, that in itself is progress, that somebody with my kind of attitude and thinking is actually there at the table. It does give me hope that change is coming and we can change things for the better. The key to that is all working together and making sure that our priorities are in the right place.”

Rachel’s influence is helping ensure that crucial decisions in the Town Investment Plan (TIP) and business case development seek to protect the environment and are creating a more sustainable way of living and doing business in Penzance.

“We’ve made the people and the environment a top priority. It is the thread that runs through our Town Deal and all the decisions that we make. We are inspired by the UN Sustainable Development Goals and also Kate Raworth’s Donut Economy, which looks at the bigger picture in terms of the environment. For me, it’s really about creating a sustainable community that’s focused on regenerative practices,” Rachel says.

Rachel’s journey to leading Sustainable Penzance and joining the Board

Rachel has always been environmentally aware and felt a connection to the ocean. It wasn’t until she saw the extent of plastic pollution on the other side of the world that she realised she had to do whatever she could to change things closer to home.

“I went to the Philippines to help rebuild a school after typhoon Haiyan in 2014. Out there I saw the awful scale of marine plastic pollution. I’d never seen anything like it before. I returned to Cornwall in the middle of the February storms and I saw exactly the same thing on my home beaches. Something inside me snapped,” she says.

Rachel started to organise beach cleans and became a local rep for Surfers Against Sewage, before becoming increasingly involved in local campaigns raising awareness of plastic pollution and water quality. This set Rachel on the path to working towards a ‘Plastic Free’ accreditation for Penzance.

“I was sent information on the ‘Plastic Free Communities’ campaign by Surfers Against Sewage, which was all about tackling plastic pollution at source” says Rachel. “That’s what I really loved about it, as we are never going to clean our way out of the problem.”



PENZANCE PUTTING PEOPLE AND PLANET FIRST

To gain the 'Plastic Free' accreditation for Penzance, Rachel had to achieve five key steps set out in the campaign toolkit:

- engage the council and gain support for the change.
- engage local businesses and work with them to reduce their single use plastic waste.
- work with local schools, community groups and organisations to raise awareness.
- and host a number of public events.

Rachel and a team of volunteers then had to set up a steering group to continue the work once accreditation was achieved. They secured a 'Plastic Free' accreditation for Penzance in 2017 and have been working since to deliver on each of the five objectives. They are committed to making a real difference in their community.

"It's very easy at the moment to say that you are being sustainable, that you are eco-friendly, that you are working on your carbon emissions, but we have to ask ourselves the question 'is that actually making a difference?'"

"I love the process that we're going through with Plastic Free Penzance and continuing with Sustainable Penzance. And that's what I hope to bring to the Town Deal Board," says Rachel.

Winning hearts and minds

Rachel recognises that not everyone has had the same longstanding interest in environmental issues as she has, and that she has to support others in order to bring them along on the journey of change she wants to see.

"It's all about positive engagement," she says. "It's not about criticising people for what they're not doing, it's about really championing and encouraging people on what they are doing, because that builds more positive action."

Rachel takes this positive approach to working with the local councils too.



Rachel Yates preparing for a beach clean © courtesy Jesse EllisWallace



PENZANCE

PUTTING PEOPLE AND PLANET FIRST

“When working with the councils, it’s about showing that this is what the community wants. Councils have declared climate emergencies and made plastic free commitments, so it’s a case of saying, ‘brilliant, you’ve made a commitment to doing this. But now you’ve got to do it.’”

“We do challenge, but instead of saying ‘why aren’t you doing this or that’, we ask, ‘How can we help you do this? Can we work together on this? What is it that you need to be able to do this?’”

Rachel advocates for behavioural change by making people feel that change is possible.

“For me that engagement and that behavioural change is showing people what’s possible, inspiring them around it and making them feel good about it,” says Rachel.

Taking this positive environmental approach to the Town Deal Board

Sustainable Penzance evolved out of the Plastic Free Penzance campaign and organises around ten themes, with sustainable visions for transport, lifestyle, education, business, tourism, waste, energy, rewilding, decision making and food.

This holistic approach has offered generative crossover with the core themes addressed by the Town Deal, and a significant opportunity to make foundational change towards a more sustainable future for the town.

“This is the stuff that we need to look at differently,” says Rachel. “It’s currently not working for the planet and it isn’t working for people. So I wanted to bring those visions into the Town Deal and say to people, ‘Can we look at this differently? How do we look at the economy from a fresh perspective to make sure that we’re picking projects that aren’t just about the bottom line, but they are about people and the planet too. How are they contributing to that bigger picture?’”

Rachel has brought this approach to the wider strategic vision, as well as individual projects.

“In pretty much every project that’s come in, I’ve had to pipe up and say, I still don’t think it’s telling us enough on the sustainability front. I don’t think there’s enough on the development goals and how does this fit the donut economy? As a result, it’s been written into the next stages too so that when projects are being worked up to Business Case, they still meet a certain criteria on sustainability,” says Rachel.

Rethinking transport and connectivity have been prime examples. The focus on sustainability has prompted the Town Deal board to consider how they might support sustainable transport options so that existing residents, and the people who come to live and work in Penzance, no longer have to rely on their cars or air travel to stay connected.

A chance to see meaningful action in your place

“It’s been really interesting, hard work,” says Rachel. “The people who you might assume you would have to work really hard with to get them to think differently, have actually responded really positively. Key members of the Board have been incredibly supportive and said ‘right let’s do this’, which has been really refreshing. I’m quite new to sitting on a Board, I don’t know how things usually work but apparently this has been different, which has been really cool to see and be part of.”

This story was written from a conversation with Rachel Yates, Chair of Sustainable Penzance and Town Deal Board member.

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RUNCORN
VISIONARY WATERWAYS

RUNCORN VISIONARY WATERWAYS

Graham Wallace is a retired Royal Naval veteran who spent his childhood living on the banks of the Bridgewater Canal, which ran through the heart of Runcorn.

“I’ve always had a link with the canal but travelling by boat really opened my eyes,” says Graham. “If you go through the town on the canal you get a different perspective than from walking down the high street.”

It was this alternative perspective of Runcorn that inspired Graham to start the ‘Unlock Runcorn’ campaign to reopen the historic canal link between the Bridgewater Canal and the Manchester Ship Canal (historically the River Mersey).

As chairman of Runcorn Lock Restoration Society (RLRS) and member of the Runcorn Town Deal Board, Graham now dedicates his time to re-energising the town’s historic waterways. He believes bringing state of the art technology to Runcorn, not seen in the UK, is one of the answers to attracting visitors and potential investors back to the town by boat and by foot.

“We’re not just restoring a link, we’re using 21st century technology to create a unique boat lift, and we will transport boats at the bottom end using an inclined plane. The inclined plane boat lift uses a carriage or a lorry to lift boats up a level, it’s quicker and wastes less water than the more common lock system.”

“There are examples in other countries, but there aren’t any still in use in England,” says Graham.

A historic link: from Runcorn to the world!

The Bridgewater Canal is deeply entwined in the history of Runcorn and Graham speaks passionately about both the canal and town, sharing his knowledge with the local community.

“In 1776, when the canal first opened, it was the main transport lane between Manchester and the rest of the world. Runcorn’s economy was built upon that in the industrial revolution,” he explains.

Graham’s ambition is to reconnect the waterways that give Runcorn its unique identity, returning to the waters that remain one of the town’s most valuable assets. The phased plan celebrates the town’s industrial heritage with the aim of revitalising Runcorn’s economy for the future – and include a new marina, boat lift, visitor attraction and cultural centre.

“The implications are huge. Not just for the canal, not just for boaters, but for people to come and see the attraction we hope to create, and for the town as a whole to benefit from the footfall,” says Graham.

The canal: more relevant today than it’s ever been

“From the 60s the pleasure crafts started making use of the canals. Now they are as busy as they ever were,” says Graham.

Currently, thousands of boaters use the Bridgewater Canal every year. Yet they are bypassing the Runcorn arm which was bricked in at Waterloo Bridge in the 1960s to support roads feeding the Silver Jubilee Bridge. This turned Runcorn into a cul-de-sac.

As the Bridgewater Canal carries on through the system, past the town, it transports thousands of potential visitors and a valuable revenue stream for the local economy. Graham is determined to change that. The new Mersey Gateway crossing opening in 2017 provided the opportunity to move the roads, reopen the canal and to unlock Runcorn.

“Opening the link to the main canal system, creating this opportunity for boats to come to Runcorn and rejoin the canal at the Trent-on-Mersey and beyond will once again bring people into the town,” Graham says. “As well as boosting the economy, and raising the general wellbeing of our residents, it’s also an opportunity for local businesses to prosper from increased footfall.”



RUNCORN VISIONARY WATERWAYS

Unlocking a more prosperous future

This first phase will make the most of the funding that is being sought from the Runcorn Town Deal. “It will enable us to build and open the boat lift,” says Graham. “Boats can use the lift to turn around and go back. It’s like a taster, and hopefully that will bring in more interest from developers to do phase two and three. It will be slightly more expensive working in phases, but unfortunately, that’s the way we have to go.”

Persistence, passion and getting your house in order

Graham puts his successes with the ‘Unlock Runcorn’ campaign down to persistence. He also invested a significant amount of time in sharing his passion with others.

“I did walks, and talks, invited the boating community in, and encouraged the local community to contact the council,” he says.

A project development grant from the Liverpool City Region enabled the Runcorn Lock Restoration Society to develop a business strategy which is Green Book compliant. It also put them on a more professional footing to engage with the council, and to capitalise on the funding available from the Towns Fund programme.

“If you’re a charity looking to invest in a project of this magnitude you must get your own house in order at the very early stages. I’ve learnt that we should have got ourselves in the position we’re in now a few years ago, but we’re here now,” says Graham.



Graham Wallace, with Runcorn Lock Restoration Society volunteers © courtesy Graham Wallace



RUNCORN VISIONARY WATERWAYS

Runcorn is ready for change

Runcorn is a town shaped by historic waterways. As the community looks to the future, the Bridgewater Canal is set to play a significant role in fuelling the town's local economy for generations to come.

"People in Runcorn are just ready for change, and really support us. We are a community-based operation and will always be a community project. We will always use volunteers, all jobs that are created from the visitor centre, the marina, and the attraction itself will come from the local economy. The community is 100% behind this project," says Graham.



Graham Wallace, with Runcorn Lock Restoration Society volunteers © courtesy Graham Wallace

This story was written from a conversation with Graham Wallace, Chairman of Runcorn Lock Restoration Society and Runcorn Town Deal Board member.

Runcorn is one of 101 places invited by the government to develop Town Deal proposals to deliver long-term economic recovery, clean growth, jobs and prosperity as part of the £3.6 billion Towns Fund.

Runcorn has submitted its Town Investment Plan and the government is in the process of assessing the Town Deal proposals. The outcome of this assessment will be confirmed in due course.



WARRINGTON

USING CROSS-SECTOR COLLABORATION

WARRINGTON USING CROSS-SECTOR COLLABORATION

Matt Crompton is the Chair of the Town Deal Board for Warrington. Matt tells us the story of Warrington and what the Towns Fund will mean for his local community.

**Imagine you are walking through your Town five years from now. What might you see and hear?
How might it feel to live, work or relax here?**

Warrington is a connected and united community, with a bustling town centre that is reflective of its happy, healthy and diverse residents. It is a town bursting with energy and ambition, where the wellbeing of our residents is always a priority.

As an important well-connected commuter town with a rich heritage going back to Roman times, Warrington is a place where people are proud to live, work and play. Those who are born in our town choose to remain and are proud to put down roots here. Warrington's impressive cultural offering, a strong range and quality of jobs, access to green space, key commuter links and high-performing schools attracts outsiders, all of which contributes towards making our town an even better place to reside.

An ideal choice for people from all walks of life, from families to young professionals and older generations, our town brings people and industry sectors together, including education, healthcare, retail, leisure, arts and more, to ensure a happy and well-rounded lifestyle for all. Through collaboration and connectivity, Warrington is a place where people thrive.

You decide to write a blog to share with your network about the changes underway. In it you highlight some of the ways the Towns Fund programme helped to unlock this new future for your town. Start a post...

It has been a real journey for Warrington as we have sought to continue to maximise the potential of our town through the Towns Fund programme.

We have an aspirational vision for Warrington that includes putting education, culture, digitalisation and an improved environmental impact at the forefront of the town's agenda. With funds and resources from the Towns Fund we have come closer to fulfilling some of the crucial elements to this vision to progress projects such as our Health & Wellbeing Hub and Active Travel programme.

This vital funding has helped us facilitate our ideas and dreams for the future of Warrington, which involves cross-sector collaboration across the town to create an environment everyone wants to be a part of.

We have unified the town through a collective sense of responsibility, and the whole town working towards a common goal. With this, we have shifted focus so that it is all about the residents and what they want from their town – and we continue to respond to this through ongoing engagement activities.

Engagement has also been at the forefront of Warrington's agenda and the Towns Fund allowed us to prove this in new and exciting ways. Our primary mission was to improve the way of life for the people, businesses, charities and other organisations in the town, which is exactly what we have achieved.

Through our Town Deal funded projects, we have helped create a town that our residents are even more proud of, and brought them on the journey with us throughout, encouraging them to engage and inform how services and industries have evolved.

We are listening to the experiences and feedback of the people who matter most - our residents - and have shaped our plans for the future around their suggestions.

As a result, the people of Warrington understand that this is their town, and they have become a crucial part of its history by offering their feedback and helping us to shape a vision for Warrington's future.



WARRINGTON USING CROSS-SECTOR COLLABORATION

How will you use your role within the community of your town to ensure you collectively reach this future?

My role will be to help ensure that all the people benefiting from the Towns Fund are coming together to shout about how improved services are impacting their daily lives.

I will focus on communicating this message of collaboration, focusing on responding to the evolving needs of Warrington's residents. Our future will be shaped by our engagement and collaboration with Warrington's communities.

We will encourage leaders across the town to nurture public momentum around our projects. A key part of this is sharing the benefits of our plans and continuing to encourage widespread community engagement and action.

The nature of the Towns Fund work means that some objectives are extensive and will take time, but we are proud that our plans are aspirational and ambitious. We want everybody in the town to feel confident and proud of their choice to live in Warrington.

We want people to shout about the fantastic lifestyle they have as a result of the key changes we are able to make to secure a bright future for our town.



*Warrington Market opened in July 2020 as part of the larger Time Square redevelopment
© Warrington Borough Council*

This open call story was submitted by Matt Crompton, Chair of the Town Deal Board for Warrington.

Warrington is one of 101 places invited by the government to develop Town Deal proposals to deliver long-term economic recovery, clean growth, jobs and prosperity as part of the £3.6 billion Towns Fund.

Warrington has submitted its Town Investment Plan and has secured a Town Deal worth up to £22.1 million. Warrington is currently developing business cases to take forward its Town Deal proposals.



NEWCASTLE-UNDER-LYME

ATTRACTING THE CIRCUS CROWDS

NEWCASTLE-UNDER-LYME ATTRACTING THE CIRCUS CROWDS

Newcastle-under-Lyme's father of modern circus

"Philip Astley could be to Newcastle-under-Lyme what Shakespeare is to Stratford-upon-Avon", says Andrew van Buren, the showman from Newcastle-under-Lyme advising the Town Deal Board on plans to create an internationally recognised circus hub in the town as part of its Town Investment Plan.

As a child Andrew van Buren toured the country with his parents' illusion magic show. He was raised on the stories of Philip Astley, a master equestrian, entrepreneur, war hero, pioneer and showman. Philip Astley, born in 1742 in Newcastle-under-Lyme was the son of a cabinet maker. He was to change the world with his invention of the modern day circus.

Reviving Astley's story

Over the last two decades Andrew van Buren has been determined to bring the story of Philip Astley and his connection to Newcastle-under-Lyme to wider public acclaim. Despite his own adoration for Philip Astley, in 1992 Andrew realised through conversations with other residents that there was very little awareness locally of Astley and what he had achieved. This sparked an ambition in Andrew that still burns today - to raise awareness of Philip Astley and to give something back to Newcastle-under-Lyme, the birthplace they share.

As Andrew continued his career touring entertainment shows around the world, he would always come home to Newcastle-under-Lyme. In 2009 he advised the Royal Shakespeare Company and also toured on cruise ships, but when Andrew and his partner returned from performing in Dubai that year it hit them:

"Every time we come home a little bit of our hometown is dying," he recalls. "There were more shops closing, there was more graffiti. It just felt more downtrodden. And that's when I realised there must be something to help this place."

A creative lifeline for a town in decline

Andrew van Buren returned to what he knew best: the incredible story of Philip Astley. Noting that 2018 would mark the 250th anniversary of Philip Astley creating the modern circus, Andrew recognised this remarkable opportunity to bring Astley's name back into public awareness and to shine a light on Newcastle-under-Lyme.

"This is such a massive opportunity to spread the word, but it also offers a lifeline to his and my birthplace."

Andrew had thought at the time. He swiftly reignited his Philip Astley awareness "crusade" and set to work organising what was to become the Philip Astley Project, initially a year-long creative programme from 2017-18 celebrating the legacy of Philip Astley in the town of Newcastle-under-Lyme.

The Philip Astley Project brought exhibitions, talks, film screenings, storytelling, circus skills training, a circus challenge for schools, AstleyFest, and a town trail all to Newcastle-under-Lyme.

Forging new partnerships across the region

The project was managed by Staffordshire University on behalf of a steering group of key local stakeholders including - Appetite, Brampton Museum, Friends of the Brampton Museum, Keele University, Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council, the local Business Improvement District, Civic Society, Newcastle-under-Lyme College, New Vic Theatre, Staffordshire Film Archive, Staffordshire Libraries, Philip Astley Project Chair, Wenslie Naylor and the van Buren Organisation. The success of the 2018 Philip Astley Project created a vital network of partners across the region, strengthened relationships and trialed new forms of collaboration that have continued since.



NEWCASTLE-UNDER-LYME ATTRACTING THE CIRCUS CROWDS

“I think the key point of learning was that we needed a clear direction with it”, he says. “It needed that determination, drive and collaboration. One of the things that’s come from this is it’s brought so many people together” says Andrew.

Riding high on their successes Andrew van Buren and the Philip Astley Project partners are seeking to ensure that plans for the future of Newcastle-under-Lyme celebrate and build up this unique cultural heritage.

Proposals aim to establish Newcastle-under-Lyme as an internationally recognised circus hub, teaching both the history of Astley’s circus and the most innovative skills in the industry, both backstage and in the ring. “We want to do something that creates that sense of pride and creativity.” Andrew says, bursting with passion and excitement for what the future might hold for Philip Astley and Newcastle-under-Lyme.

Creating a destination for circus innovation and tourism

Having witnessed a thriving tourism industry during his time in Dubai, Andrew is convinced of the positive impact an established tourist attraction could have on his town. Closer to home Andrew’s time with the Royal Shakespeare Company had reminded him of the transformative effect of being a recognised birthplace of a cultural icon.

Andrew was later to coin the phrase: “Philip Astley could be to Newcastle-under-Lyme what Shakespeare is to Stratford-upon-Avon” to underline what he sees as the potential impact Philip Astley’s legacy could have on the town.

“It’s an incredible town, Newcastle-under-Lyme, but there’s not really anything to draw people there, other than shops and it’s a pretty town.” Andrew says, with a mixture of pride and pragmatism. “You need other things to draw people in.”



Andrew van Buren with sculpture of Phil Astley © Andrew van Buren



NEWCASTLE-UNDER-LYME ATTRACTING THE CIRCUS CROWDS

The 2018 Philip Astley Project was able to do just that.

“It worked! People came in to watch the events in the town. They actually looked around, they spent money while they were there. It’s a way of combatting the reliance on shopping, which has been impacted by the internet. I think this is really important for all towns, to have another angle.”

Since 2018 awareness of Philip Astley has grown and with it Newcastle-under-Lyme has been able to reframe its profile as a town of creativity and innovation. People from all corners of the globe are becoming familiar with the name of the birthplace of Philip Astley. Andrew says, “There are people who have actually flown in from Brazil to visit the birthplace of Astley. From France, Portugal, Spain, Italy, and from Monte Carlo.” All drawn to Newcastle-under-Lyme for its connection with the founding father of modern circus.



Courtesy of Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council Town Investment Plan

This story was written from a conversation with Andrew van Buren, showman and owner of the van Buren Organisation.

Newcastle-under-Lyme is one of 101 places invited by the government to develop Town Deal proposals to deliver long-term economic recovery, clean growth, jobs and prosperity as part of the £3.6 billion Towns Fund.

Newcastle-under-Lyme has submitted a successful Town Investment Plan and secured a Town Deal of up to £23.6 million. Newcastle-under-Lyme is currently developing business cases to take forward its Town Deal proposals.



SOUTHPORT

REIMAGINING THE SEASIDE TOWN OF THE FUTURE

SOUTHPORT REIMAGINING THE SEASIDE TOWN OF THE FUTURE

Southport is reimagining the seaside town of the future. At the heart of the town's approach is a commitment to listen to young people. The Town Deal Youth Shadow Board has already inspired plans to fully equip the new convention centre for state-of-the-art e-sports events, and ambitions to shape Southport into a place of 21st century entertainment and leisure. These relationships nurtured through the Town Deal Board and Southport College have amplified calls for diverse learning and employment opportunities to attract young people from Southport to stay and build a fulfilling life in their town.

Listening to young people

Southport is a large coastal town situated in the Liverpool City Region, on the shores of the Irish Sea. The town blossomed in the 19th century serving local sea bathers and holiday makers, and when the railway arrived in the 1840s, Southport became a town of national renown. The Victorian architecture that remains is a reminder of the town's historic glory years. Southport Pleasureland Theme Park opened in 1912, and over 100 years later the seaside resort of Southport welcomes over 8 million visitors a year seeking entertainment and leisure. However, Southport has experienced decline since its heyday and its story echoes that of seaside towns up and down the country.

"A lot of people just come here to retire," says Amelia Louise, HND Travel and Tourism student at Southport College and Youth Shadow Board member.

"The town is not really young people-orientated at the moment. Lord Street is full of charity shops and a few coffee shops. There are nice walks and you've got all the beaches and coastline, which is one good thing about Southport and the surrounding area that brings people to us. But there is nothing else in Southport and not a lot of young people just want to go on a walk."

Amelia grew up in Southport and attends Southport College. She dreams of travelling the world and does not currently imagine settling in Southport as an adult.

Addressing youth flight and encouraging the young to reach new heights

Youth flight is a significant challenge for Southport with many of the town's 18-21 year-olds leaving for higher education or job opportunities further afield and not coming back. The town's population of 18 to 24 year-olds has fallen by 21.8% over the last 30 years.

"We will not survive on hospitality, tourism and the visitor economy alone", says Michelle Brabner, Principal CEO of Southport College and Town Deal Board member. "We need something that is underpinning these sectors, but we should never lose that focus of what makes Southport special."

For Michelle, it is crucial to show that Southport is also a place of future opportunity.

"Young people in the area need to see that the town is somewhere they can have a really ambitious and aspirational career, and it is not just a place of temporary seasonal work," she says.

Hearing from a range of voices

Setting up the Youth Shadow Board and listening to young people in the schools and colleges across the town throughout the Town Deal process, has signalled a clear intent to bring the voices of young people into the conversation from the outset. The process has been a chance to connect the dots between education, skills and future employment. It has also established the mechanisms for keeping young people involved in decision-making right through to the delivery phases of the projects.



SOUTHPORT REIMAGINING THE SEASIDE TOWN OF THE FUTURE

Southport Town Deal Board realised early on that in order to change the direction of the town in a meaningful way for local people across multiple generations, it was important to hear from a wide range of voices. Andrew Booth runs Sefton Advocacy, an independent charity, supporting vulnerable people to make their voices heard. He is also Vice-Chair of the Town Deal Board and Chair of the Youth Shadow Board.

“The Town Investment Plan would have ended up being quite generic, and based on what we knew worked”, says Andrew. “Working with the groups of older people, people with learning disabilities and then the development of the Shadow Board, has made all the difference.”

Turning a theatre no longer fit for purpose into a new convention centre and e-sports venue for the future

Youth Shadow Board members Emma and Amelia are Travel and Tourism students at Southport College. Being involved in the Towns Fund programme and imagining the future of their town has given them a new sense of confidence.

“We can share ideas to improve the town,” says Amelia, “We have been talking about it with all our classmates and discussing the things we can improve on. It has been good for us.”

“I used to work at the Southport Theatre and it was my favourite job of all, it was incredible,” says Emma. “I had only worked there for three months and it shut down. I was devastated. Then they mentioned a plan to turn it into an e-sports centre, and I was just really interested in that.”

For Michelle and others in the town who are actively looking at the curriculum of the future, the move to embrace e-sports in Southport was a welcome development from engaging young people in the Town Deal process.

“Because we were looking at the curriculum of the future, we were already looking at e-sports. When we talk to the school leavers coming through, it is a very real thing to them and a potential future career,” says Michelle. “I think it’s things like that – the idea of what the event centre could be used for, that did generate new discussions, as a result of comments that were made by the students in the Shadow Board.”



*Towns Fund proposals for e-sports gaming events at a new convention centre in Southport
© Sefton Council, Towns Deal bid video still, 2020*



SOUTHPORT REIMAGINING THE SEASIDE TOWN OF THE FUTURE

Engaging widely and looking ahead

Andrew admits that when he first heard the idea of bringing e-sports to Southport, he was unaware of the massive potential involved in this rapidly expanding industry.

“I am looking at it from the point of view of a 60 year-old man who has played games. I am not looking at it from the perspective of a young person who wants a career in games development, or what can be done to pull more people into the Town.” Andrew’s insight highlights why it has been so vital to value the voices of Southport’s young people.

“The students and the other groups of young people are going to be really important in our learning,” says Andrew.

“I think the engagement of the broadest panorama of individuals, with a particular focus on those who we want to come back and continue to grow Southport was the mainstay of the board,” says Andrew.

“Unless we do it this way, we’ll end up with something that’s already been done. So, I am really happy that the Board took that, ran with it and actively invested in supporting it.”

For Southport, the key to imagining what their Town can be in the future has been to really listen to young people. To be open about what ideas can be taken forward, but equally to give clear communication around what is not possible and why. This is an approach taken by Andrew in all his advocacy work. This youth-focused approach is the cornerstone for working with the Youth Shadow Board and wider community to collectively shape a seaside resort fit for the 21st century.



Courtesy of Sefton Council and Southport Town Investment Plan

This story was written from conversations with Andrew Booth, Chief Executive Officer, Sefton Advocacy; Emma and Amelia, HND Travel and Tourism students at Southport College; and a conversation with Michelle Brabner, Principal CEO Southport College.

Southport is one of 101 places invited by the government to develop Town Deal proposals to deliver long-term economic recovery, clean growth, jobs and prosperity as part of the £3.6 billion Towns Fund.

Southport has submitted a successful Town Investment Plan and secured a Town Deal of up to £37.5 million.



CREWE

RECAPTURING INDUSTRIAL PAST AND RAILWAY HERITAGE

CREWE RECAPTURING INDUSTRIAL PAST AND RAILWAY HERITAGE

Simon Yates is the Vice Chair of the Town Deal Board for Crewe. Simon tells us the story of Crewe and what the Towns Fund will mean for his local community.

Imagine you are walking through your town five years from now. What might you see and hear? How might it feel to live, work or relax here?

How fantastic to see people living, working, socialising and being entertained in the town centre!

People can walk safely and freely through public spaces between the retail, civic, cultural and leisure quarters. Our residents and visitors can stop off at the Market Hall, which is restored to its historic 1855 original design, but with a massive modern twist. We have opened up the building's large Victorian archways as entrances to welcome Crewe's creative community to take advantage of the new event space constructed within it.

People living in the surrounding suburbs are coming into our town to take advantage of everything Crewe can provide. They come to Crewe to take in our rich cultural and historical heritage and notice the positive impact that new start-up businesses have had in making Crewe more vibrant.

You decide to write a blog to share with your network about the changes underway. In it you highlight some of the ways the Towns Fund programme helped to unlock this new future for your town. Start a post...

Do you remember the first shoots of Crewe's green recovery?

It started when our Market Hall was able to open its doors again and support eco-friendly independent businesses after the long wait for the Covid-19 restrictions to be lifted. The Towns Fund is helping Crewe build upon this transformation. This is through projects like the reimagining of Lyceum Square, a new high quality outdoor events and performance space. We're also continuing our green recovery through the Crewe Pocket Parks and Public Open Spaces Improvement Programme, which will encourage our community to come together outdoors.

In early 2020, the recently formed Crewe Town Board had submitted a plan to government for a massive injection of capital to bring the town centre back together again and back to life. We were determined to recapture what is special about our town and use our history to shape our future.

The iconic Bentley Motors is now expanding. HS2 is just around the corner, making a huge difference by improving the transport connections between Crewe and the whole of the UK. Turning Crewe into the destination point we deserve to be. We have got an opportunity to open Crewe up and celebrate our industrial past with modern transport links bringing us into the future.

Our work to support our town has all been carried out by people passionate about Crewe stepping up to the plate. We are getting behind the thousands of people in Crewe providing charity and community support to create a better future.



CREWE RECAPTURING INDUSTRIAL PAST AND RAILWAY HERITAGE

How will you use your role within the community of your town to ensure you collectively reach this future?

One of our greatest challenges has been to raise the expectations of the people of Crewe and the surrounding settlements of how our town can improve. This can, and has been done by engaging with community groups across the town so that local people feel part of the process and that the days of being forgotten and left behind are gone.

Our community and youth groups representing people across Crewe are key in helping us work with local people to look forwards and plan for the years to come, together.

We want to support the people who live in Crewe and create a legacy for our town that attracts people from across Cheshire and further afield. This is an opportunity to raise our profile, generate investment to support our economic development, and secure a more prosperous future.



Render of the completed Market Hall © weareallcrewe.co.uk

This open call story was submitted by Simon Yates, Vice Chair of the Town Deal Board for Crewe.

Crewe is one of 101 places invited by the government to develop Town Deal proposals to deliver long-term economic recovery, clean growth, jobs and prosperity as part of the £3.6 billion Towns Fund.

Crewe has submitted its Town Investment Plan and has secured a Town Deal of up to 22.9 million. Crewe is currently developing business cases to take forward its Town Deal proposals.



CREWE AND NEWHAVEN

REIMAGINING THE TOWN CENTRE

CREWE AND NEWHAVEN REIMAGINING THE TOWN CENTRE

Our Town Stories Conversations brings together towns to discuss a shared topic at the heart of their Towns Fund experience.

In our first Conversation, Simon Yates, Vice Chair of the Crewe Town Deal Board and Peter Sharp, Head of Regeneration for Lewes and Eastbourne Councils discuss their experiences of bringing together their Town Deal and Future High Streets Fund to work for each of their towns.

Simon Yates (Simon), Crewe: I'm the Vice Chair of the Crewe Town Deal Board. We received our Town Deal offer in July 2021. I've lived or worked in Crewe since 1990. I was in healthcare management and ran the hospital in the town. When I retired a number of years ago, I got involved in local politics. I was Leader of the town council in Crewe. One of the big things that really interested me at the time was economic regeneration.

The collapse of the railway works around which the town had been built since the 1830s and 40s, meant there was a hollowing out of the town centre and a massive shift if you like in skills, income and demography in the town.

Peter Sharp (Peter), Newhaven: Newhaven is a small town on the south coast and has many of the same challenges that Simon has highlighted in Crewe, particularly around the decline of the port.

My team's remit is around economic development and regeneration, and we lead on different grant funding bids across the Lewes and Eastbourne council areas. We were successful in getting the Future High Streets funding, and we also had our Town Deal offer in the last announcement in July.

The reason we've had the focus for funding is because a lot of the towns around us are really affluent. Newhaven is almost the town that time forgot. It feels like there's a lot of similarities between Crewe and Newhaven, even though we're in different parts of the country.

Our Town Stories: What is your vision for a high street or town centre fit for the future, and can you describe the strategic themes across both Future High Streets Fund and your Town Deal?

Peter: We have been through a process of reimagining Newhaven town centre. The coast road that runs through Newhaven, built in the 1970s, was created as a one-way system which encircled the town centre. It literally cut the town centre off from the surrounding residential and employment areas. It has become an unpleasant environment, so nobody wants to go there anymore. Our vision is to reimagine it as a focus for community life and we linked the strategic themes of the Future High Streets Fund and the Town Deal together to help us realise this vision.

It's all been underpinned by some engagement we undertook in 2018 and 2019. We have an Enterprise Zone in Newhaven, and as part of that we developed something we call the Newhaven Story. We spoke to a wide range of stakeholders, held workshops with community groups and others, and asked, "What do you see as Newhaven's assets, what are our challenges?"

That created three distinctive pillars, or themes which were: 'Valuing creative freedom'; 'Marine in the making' and 'Celebrating the energy of industry'. We've tried to build upon valuing creative freedom in the high street plans. We have a multi-purpose event space and creative hub - we've got a very strong local creative sector that we're trying to support and grow.

Simon: Crewe sits as the largest settlement in quite a wealthy area of the north west of England. Yet it has a poor record of public health issues, family income levels and housing conditions. There has been low educational attainment by secondary school age children within Crewe. This has faced some cynicism and scepticism within the town about what could be done.

For people who live outside the town centre - and that population has been growing in the last 20 years - there is a mixture of disdain, contempt and indifference to Crewe.



CREWE AND NEWHAVEN REIMAGINING THE TOWN CENTRE

Our vision is for a town centre that is attractive to people who live in the town, while also appealing to people who live outside. We have to appeal to people with little money or buying power as well as those who have the wealth to spend in the town. That's been quite a difficult match. It's been a difficult message politically, trying to bring all these ideas together, but in the end, it's very similar to Peter's story.

A jewel in the crown for Crewe, the Lyceum Theatre, has been central to a lot of the things that we've done, as have other places that are part of Crewe's industrial heritage. What we're trying to do is make sure that the Town Deal projects are complementary to the projects that had already been identified in the Future High Streets Fund.

The town centre is defined by the railway lines in Crewe, which split the town. Peter was talking about the ring road, well the railways do that job in Crewe. What it means is that you can have quite small areas of the town which are physically, culturally and sociologically divided by the railways. How do you pull those together?

The retail envelope is far too large at the moment. There's an incredibly successful, just out of centre retail park. There's a great big railway and a bridge that goes between that and the civic part of the town. But it might as well be 20 miles apart in terms of getting people to cross over.

As for strategic themes across the two funds, culture is the first thing. There's been quite an interesting debate about whether the people of Crewe are interested in culture. Peter was talking about the successful cultural development in Newhaven and it's very similar for Crewe.

It's amazing that the only community groups of any size that had created a strategy for the town are culture-focused groups. What we've done is to use the power they have created over a number of years to try and get others to adopt a similar sort of approach. Because when we got into the process we found there's lots of ideas, but very little had been worked up, in terms of schemes and projects.

Culture, industrial heritage, restoring a sense of community pride. Those are the big themes that we tried to focus on.



Image found on other sites credited to freepik.com



CREWE AND NEWHAVEN REIMAGINING THE TOWN CENTRE

Our Town Stories: You've both already started to touch on this. What do you see as the core challenges to a thriving high street and town centre?

Peter: One of the challenges we've faced is that a lot of the regeneration has come before Future High Streets Fund and Towns Fund. Whilst it's been beneficial for Newhaven as a whole, sometimes the community doesn't feel that it talks to them.

In our Town Investment Plan (TIP), we identified the challenge of how to create what we called a social return on investment. How do we give that positive community aspect to our projects and to the investment?

We have the Enterprise Zone which is great. It has created jobs and attracted investment. But because of the low skills in the town, it hasn't yet created jobs for local people, so this is something we're working on. At the moment people from the surrounding affluent areas are commuting into work and then leaving again without spending money.

At the end of 2019, just before Covid-19, our street fronting retail vacancy rate in Newhaven town centre was 19.8%, double the national average at that time. The rate had more than doubled in a decade in Newhaven. A survey we did found that around half of visitors to the town centre stayed less than one hour. The town centre is being used as a convenience location, not a destination in its own right. Something like 47% spent less than £10 in a visit.

We've had to think about new uses and reimagine the high street to bring in footfall. We are trying to bring in more events and activity into the town centre and have been making empty buildings available for meanwhile use. One short-term meanwhile lease was provided to a vets, which has brought in significant footfall. We have started to see some initial benefits from that.

Simon: I think one of our challenges has been around community engagement and giving the people in the town the idea that something can be done and change is on the horizon. You have to do it with little steps. Gradually, we are making that happen. Social media has the knockers being knocked and we've got to keep the pace up.

Our Town Stories: In what ways have Future High Streets Fund and your Town Deal enabled you to develop long term strategies for your high streets and town centres and why is this important?

Simon: That's a really interesting point. One of the things I find quite difficult is navigating how the funding works. The context if you like, around the Town Deal, which is very different from anything else.

The Future High Streets Fund was happening before the Town Deal came along and the only people involved in it was the local authority. Our Town Deal creates a completely different model of doing things, and actually, if you don't want to tie the two things together, you don't have to. Fortunately I think we've been able to develop something which is complementary. But, you've got these different models, or vehicles of doing things and the great danger is if you're not careful you create different silos, you don't provide the opportunity for stuff to move across.

What we've tried to show through our TIP, is the importance of vision and strategy. Because unless you've got that, you end up jumping like Pavlov's dog to the pots of money when they're offered out without having the sense of how you create something bigger than just the sum of the parts.

We've already decided that as we go through this next year around the business case for the Town Deal that we've got to be pretty clear about making sure that any other pots of money that appear play into the same vision.

Peter: Simon's absolutely right, that challenge of constantly chasing money is problematic. But having done the Newhaven Story, and the engagement we started with the Enterprise Zone, that gave us this strategic overview if you like.

That was the basis for all of the strategic visions, across all of the bids, and that includes the Levelling Up Fund submission that we put in recently. That's been how we've linked things together. But it is a challenge where you have competitive funding pots, and particularly for myself as a council employee.



CREWE AND NEWHAVEN REIMAGINING THE TOWN CENTRE

It's not just about Newhaven. We're not a town council, we're a district council. We get criticism about a disproportionate focus on Newhaven, despite the fact it has the biggest structural economic challenges.

Our Town Stories: In what ways have you been able to engage and support local leadership around a shared strategy?

Peter: Some of that started with the designation of the Enterprise Zone. We created a strategic board to involve local business leaders, community leaders and senior management from our local authorities.

All of those groups were already on board with the same principles and then it was a case of getting the politicians on board as part of the Future High Streets Fund and Town Deal journey. Certainly initially, we had some challenges with our Future High Streets bid because it was focused on the non-traditional, creative and cultural sectors. I think our mistake initially was that we hadn't done enough to really highlight the burgeoning growth within that sector locally. We rectified it quite quickly by really highlighting the number of local people involved in the sector.

Certainly developing the TIP at quite a granular level has helped with local leadership because it's really got them involved in what's going on. Taking them through for example how the Green Book works, was an opportunity to educate our local leaders and others.

We can't just talk about a wish list, you've got to have deliverable projects to make this work. If we haven't, then we can look at developing them, but they're not going to be ready now. They may be ready for future funding bids.

Simon: It's really been quite an interesting exercise from a political point of view in Crewe. From very early on there was quite a difficult position, in terms of getting the Town Deal Board established and understanding what the relationship would be between the Town Deal Board and the local authority.

We struggled to find a way of dealing with the divides that were there. How do you create a successful organisation when you've got people from the business community who don't want to get involved in the political side of things?

And the political divides between the MP and the Leader of the town council. It's been a massive thing to do.

I think it's demonstrated that actually if you create a model, which brings people together where you are not necessarily forcing people into the sort of the open political standpoints that normally have to be adopted, then you can find a way through.

The opportunity to have a Town Deal Board like this has demonstrated that in a large local authority, you need to have something that focuses specifically on the needs of particular areas within the boundaries of a large local authority. Otherwise everything gets mixed up. If you don't get down to the granular level of the importance of the specific needs of local communities, then you don't analyse and get to the bottom of it enough to get the right solutions.

Our Town Stories: What advice would you give to other towns that want to make the most of the public funding available, attract private investment with the aim of creating high streets that are thriving, sustainable and fit for the 21st century?

Peter: Every town in the country wants to do that. I think the most important thing for me has been making sure that at a very early stage you're engaging with your communities, but making it clear that you don't have all the answers, and actually saying, "Well, what do you want?", and then challenging them. So that engagement was critical.

I think the challenge though, alongside that, was that we slightly fell into the trap of engaging with the people that wanted to engage, and not reaching the most deprived sections of the community who didn't feel the council had anything useful to offer them. This is something that we are still working to address.



CREWE AND NEWHAVEN REIMAGINING THE TOWN CENTRE

Once we understood what our businesses wanted, and understood what the key community groups wanted, that really steered us in a certain direction. We created seven different programmes centred around what the engagement told us.

We really try to focus on showing how the engagement we've undertaken with the community genuinely informs our plans and wasn't just paying lip service.

That was really important for us, that's probably the key thing I'd say.

Simon: The biggest gap for us was quite a poor response from the business community when we went out and asked for ideas and proposals. This was a real surprise because the Chamber of Commerce is strong locally and up until Covid-19, business had been strong in Crewe. Yeah, we've got some big players, a lot of engineering firms and railway-based activities, but there was very little comment about what they were looking for. What we did was to go further afield. We talked to prospective businesses about what it is that makes an area attractive to them if an employer wants to recruit people to come and live in a particular area.

We've got things like HS2 to come which is already making a big difference in terms of land availability and outside investment. Even so, anybody moving their business into an area like Crewe would need to demonstrate to the people who work for them that it's a place that they would want to go to, which is why we've put so much effort into trying to work out what makes an area attractive for people to come and live and work.

The issue has to be, how do you use the investment of public money, not as a subsidy for private investment, but to create the environment, which enables private investment. In the end, public sector bodies alone are never going to have enough in order to bring about the changes that are needed in the town but they really can be the catalyst. And I guess that's the way we've gone about it.

Our Town Stories: What do you hope the experience of your high street will be in say five years from now? Do you have any final thoughts to share?

Peter: For me, I would hope that Newhaven's high street becomes a destination in its own right, rather than for popping into town for a loaf of bread or pint of milk. It offers something that really becomes the focal point for community life, something that we haven't had for probably 30 or 40 years. I think we will see significant private investment over the coming years, but it's very hard to calculate exactly how much at the moment. If what we are doing comes off in the way we envisage, it becomes a destination again, it will attract people in but not necessarily for retail. It will be a multifunctional community hub, if you like, as a whole town centre.

Simon: We are thinking of something very similar really. The town centre's no longer going to be about retail. It is going to be about a whole range of different experiences, which will be retail, leisure, but also culture and heritage activities. Event spaces, people coming together. With the new uses of the market, we can already see families meeting together, people bumping into each other again. People want to be able to engage with one another again.

This conversation was held on 16 August 2021 between Simon Yates, Chair of Crewe Town Deal Board and Peter Sharp, Head of Regeneration for Lewes and Eastbourne Councils and hosted by Our Town Stories.

Crewe and Newhaven are two of 101 places with Town Deal offers of investment from the government to develop and deliver projects that support long-term economic recovery, regeneration, clean growth, jobs and prosperity for their Towns.

The 101 Town Deals are worth more than £2.4 billion in total and are part of the £3.6bn Towns Fund. Crewe and Newhaven were also two of 72 places that were successful in bidding for the £830m Future High Streets Fund, also part of the Towns Fund.



LOUGHBOROUGH

NURTURING TALENT AND OPPORTUNITY

LOUGHBOROUGH NURTURING TALENT AND OPPORTUNITY

We believe really firmly in civil leadership,” explains Jo Maher, Town Deal Board member and Principal and Chief Executive of Loughborough College.

“We want people to access their education and qualifications, then stay within Charnwood and Loughborough, to be economically active and to promote business and the economy locally.”

Jo has shown, through her own experience in the town, that Loughborough can and does offer opportunities for talented people to access fulfilling careers and professional leadership roles.

“I came to Loughborough as a student at the age of 18 and stayed on, working in the college whilst completing my master’s degree full-time. That enabled me to access a career straight out of university, then to develop the skills to move into leadership roles across the sector in further education,” explains Jo.

Jo is now focused on making sure the kinds of opportunities she has enjoyed are inclusive and available to people accessing training, education and employment at all levels across the town. “I became a college principal to support people to fulfil their potential,” she says.

Nurturing local talent and retaining graduates

Using data from across Leicestershire and the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) area, Jo recognised where the Town Deal could have impact. The level of education and academic attainment in Loughborough is lower than the national average and some wards in the town are experiencing higher levels of deprivation than the regional average. It was also clear that despite having a high number of students coming into the town, they were struggling to retain graduates, and meet the needs of people at career crossroads later in life.

With capital investment from the Town Deal Accelerated Funding, Jo and her team opened a Careers & Enterprise Hub in May 2021. The partnership is about “retaining talent, and improving and supporting the changing lives of people that need access to those higher-level qualifications,” explains Jo.

The Hub is already facilitating Jo and others on the Town Deal Board to deliver on their strategic intent to capture graduate talent in Loughborough and to progress it within the local community.



LOUGHBOROUGH NURTURING TALENT AND OPPORTUNITY

Investing in the heart of the community

Jo and her team converted a disused butcher shop on the high street into a multi-functional Hub. It is now a one-stop-shop for anyone seeking support with skills and employment. It is also perfectly placed to welcome passers-by and people in the community interested in seeing change taking shape.

“We’ve got a whole suite of funded qualifications in digital skills, where anybody can walk in and be trained,” described Jo. “It’s about making sure the advice and guidance is tailored to the individual.”

Located right in the centre of town, employment experts from Loughborough College offer residents guidance and support at the Hub to boost their careers or get into work. In addition, experts from Loughborough University provide guidance, training and mentoring to entrepreneurs looking to start their own business.

“It doesn’t look like a college, and it doesn’t feel like a college. The Town Deal has created this investment opportunity and has been a springboard to place this initiative bang in the heart of the community,” explained Jo. The Hub hosts careers advice and runs courses on site. The programme also supports employers to bring apprentices into their business, with access to interview spaces to run recruitment activities.



*Jo Maher in the Careers & Enterprise Hub, Loughborough
© Loughborough College*



LOUGHBOROUGH NURTURING TALENT AND OPPORTUNITY

New collaborations

Delivering the Hub through the Town Deal has provided an opportunity for the college to strengthen collaborative relationships with the university - with the aim of providing a more seamless service for Loughborough's residents seeking skills and enterprise support.

Reflecting on new, more collaborative ways of working, and galvanised by the Loughborough Town Deal, Jo explains, "It wasn't about making money, it was about doing the right thing and getting the right people around the table."

Loughborough College, Loughborough University and Charnwood Borough Council's shared philosophy of promoting social mobility, building aspiration and ambition has been crucial, says Professor Chris D Rielly, Dean of the School of Aeronautical, Automotive, Chemical and Materials Engineering at Loughborough University.

"As universities we have lots of responsibilities and one of those is bringing benefit to the local community. That's not just with local businesses or research, it's also about working with local people, getting them into jobs and developing their business ideas."

Jo and her team are now also looking at how they can work with Jobcentre Plus so people on Universal Credit can get support and address the gaps in their qualifications with careers advisors.

"It's about providing an end-to-end service from unemployment, right the way through to added skills and getting employed," says Jo. "It's about those relationships, doing that hand in hand and making sure you're not creating barriers for people."



Loughborough College Courtesy of Loughborough Town Investment Plan

A vision for the future

As part of the shared vision for these new partnerships, the future will see local communities heavily involved in the evolution of the project. "Working with businesses we want to continue to create volunteering opportunities and social value, so we can understand their needs and match our students and staff members to support those needs," concluded Jo.

This story was written from conversations with Jo Maher, Town Deal Board member and Principal and Chief Executive of Loughborough College, and Professor Chris D Rielly, Dean of the School of Aeronautical, Automotive, Chemical and Materials Engineering, Loughborough University.

Loughborough is one of 101 places invited by the government to develop Town Deal proposals to deliver long-term economic recovery, clean growth, jobs and prosperity as part of the £3.6 billion Towns Fund.

Loughborough submitted a successful Town Investment Plan and secured a Town Deal of up to £16.9 million. Loughborough is currently developing business cases to take forward its Town Deal proposals.



CLAY CROSS

ART CONNECTING PEOPLE AND PLACE

CLAY CROSS ART CONNECTING PEOPLE AND PLACE

“This project is a great illustration of how to involve and empower people in their community and engage them with what’s happening locally,” says Jane Wells, Project Coordinator at community arts charity, Junction Arts.

In Clay Cross, North East Derbyshire District Council’s (NEDDC) economic development team is making use of visual arts and creativity to imagine the future of the town with residents - and by displaying their artworks in bright lights.

By teaming up with Junction Arts, and local artist Lucie Maycock, NEDDC was able to creatively involve both young and older people in sharing their perspectives on the Town Deal. The artworks created by residents during engagement workshops explore how Clay Cross might change in the future and were then incorporated into an immersive film and soundscape by artist Will Lindley. Over three evenings in September 2021, the artworks were projected onto a disused ventilation shaft in the middle of Clay Cross - a striking feature of the town’s industrial heritage. The artworks created during the workshops offer a rich visual legacy co-created with residents, that will feed the town’s visual branding and identity for the future.

Capturing the town’s imagination

NEDDC’s Senior Regeneration Officer and Urban Designer, and Town Deal Programme Lead, Bryan Harrison, has every intention of continuing the artist-led approach to connecting the people of Clay Cross with their local community. “I think with this we’ve really captured people’s imagination and we can continue to use these images to represent the town,” he says.



Courtesy of Clay Cross Town Investment Plan

Having been involved in the town’s regeneration for over 12 years, Bryan explains his passion for Clay Cross:

This Town Deal is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to really lift our town. We’ve always seen Clay Cross as a sleeping giant in our district and now we are beginning to wake up, which is fantastic.”

Connecting to place through art

Jane, and the team at Junction Arts, are equally focused on using art as a tool for reaching communities whose voices are not always heard. “Our priority is to work in or with communities that are disadvantaged in some way, those that don’t have access to the same level of participation in the arts as perhaps other areas that are better connected to opportunities,” explains Jane. “The arts are a great way to connect with people, to share a message and engage people in what’s going on in their local area.”



CLAY CROSS

ART CONNECTING PEOPLE AND PLACE

Artist-led community engagement

Lucie Maycock is a community artist commissioned by Junction Arts to facilitate community engagement for the Town Deal. Lucie ran 19 workshops with residents, getting their opinions and looking at ideas on how to shape the future of the town through the medium of art and creativity. This resulted in 90 individual pieces of art being created during workshops with local schools, care homes and students from Chesterfield College. All these pieces of artwork will now be part of the town's identity going forward.

Lucie is interested in exploring what art can offer to the regeneration of a place.

“An artist-led piece of work will always have a different approach and that approach will be personal to the people involved, which makes it unique. You might think that uniqueness, when applied to the redevelopment of an area, wouldn't work well but that's where artists are crucial, because they can visualise how these things will mould and gel together.”

A core part of this project has involved local residents at an early stage, to give them a voice and strengthen their sense of community. “We've worked with people of all ages, but importantly, we worked closely with young people. It may sound like a cliché, but young people are the future, and it's important they feel they're listened to,” says Jane.

Engaging Clay Cross residents throughout the pandemic required a pivot towards online platforms and different kinds of collaboration. Despite what might have felt like a barrier initially, by working with staff in care homes, teachers and lecturers in the local college, the artists were able to spark people's imagination. “Jane, Lucie and the other artists are taking it to a whole new dimension. And it's absolutely fabulous, it's capturing everyone's imagination, and the Town Deal Board is thrilled with it” explains Bryan.

The team also developed a small touring exhibition, another way to raise awareness of the Town Deal development plans. “We're holding the exhibition in non-traditional venues, for example the local leisure centre and other community spaces where people already are. We're not overloading them with information, that's important,” says Bryan. “When you do a traditional consultation, we really struggle to engage with young people. This exhibition and light show is a much richer experience, I think.”



CLAY CROSS ART CONNECTING PEOPLE AND PLACE

Residents shaping the future

“We’ll be engaging and consulting our communities for years to come, because we’re just at the very beginning of this. There are many projects in the investment plan for Clay Cross and we want to get people involved at every step,” says Bryan.

With established partnerships in place with the arts and cultural sector, Jane, Lucie and Bryan are all passionate about bringing this culture-led approach into all regeneration work.

“We’ve demonstrated that this approach works so we’ll do this again,” says Bryan. “It’s our job to raise the profile of the regeneration plans and to get people behind it. For me, this is a really positive way of doing it.”

In Clay Cross this fresh approach to involving residents in the Town Deal is showing early signs that change is on its way.



Residents from Smithybrook View assisted living complex, watch the Clay Cross light display
Image © Jane Wells

This story was written from a conversation with Bryan Harrison, Senior Regeneration Officer and Urban Designer at North East Derbyshire District Council; Jane Wells, Project Coordinator at community arts charity Junction Arts; and artist Lucie Maycock.

Clay Cross is one of 101 places invited by the government to develop Town Deal proposals to deliver long-term economic recovery, clean growth, jobs and prosperity as part of the £3.6 billion Towns Fund.

Clay Cross submitted a successful Town Investment Plan and secured a Town Deal of up to £24.1 million. Clay Cross is currently developing business cases to take forward its Town Deal proposals.



BIRKENHEAD

HERITAGE TRANSPORT AND ACTIVE TRAVEL

BIRKENHEAD HERITAGE TRANSPORT AND ACTIVE TRAVEL

Liam Kelly is a member of Birkenhead Town Deal Board, Chief Executive of Make Community Interest Company (CIC), a social enterprise company for culture and creativity in Liverpool and is also Chair of Baltic Triangle CIC. His drive to create change in Birkenhead comes from a commitment to wanting to see a brighter future for his hometown.

“Wanting this change is about being from Birkenhead and growing up there. But it’s also about a genuine desire for positive change in an area that, socially, was at the forefront of many things,”

Leading the way for public green spaces, Birkenhead Park opened in 1847 and is credited with being the world’s first publicly funded civic park, and inspiration for New York’s Central Park. As Birkenhead residents shared their views on the future direction of the town it was clear that access to quality green spaces and the opportunity to engage in heritage and culture are still highly valued.

Imagining the town experience of the future

In 2020, Wirral Council engaged local communities to develop a 2040 vision for the town and to draft the Birkenhead 2040 Framework, a spatial plan which has provided the foundation for the Birkenhead Town Deal. When members of Birkenhead’s resident, business and creative communities took part in developing the vision, they focused on what they wanted the town to feel like, to live, work or relax there in 2040. Liam, who took part in the workshops reflects, “The ideas that fed into the vision came from what people desired the Birkenhead experience to be in 2040.”

This focus on the future experience of the town, rather than a fixed set of interventions, led towards shared aspirations for the town that are broad enough to include different perspectives. “It was pitched with the right level of detail to make it easier to think longer term. It would have been wrong to try to include every prescribed detail, action by action, to create a plan for 2040 and expect us to work our way there in a rigid fashion,” says Liam.

Supporting healthier futures

Currently Birkenhead residents experience significant health inequalities and there are high levels of deprivation in the town. Life expectancy for males in Birkenhead is the lowest in the Wirral at 72.8, which is nine years less than males can expect to live in other parts of the area.

Healthier lifestyles and the need for better access to culture and green spaces were recurring themes in developing the Birkenhead 2040 Framework, also picked up through engagement for the Town Deal.

“We were talking about regenerating and creating better health outcomes and life expectancies for the people that live or work in Birkenhead. That led us to the need for better access to green space which would enable and encourage active lifestyles such as cycling, walking and space to relax,” says Liam.

This ambition for the town has led to the prioritisation of Town Deal projects that improve access to green spaces and the opportunity for local residents to engage with culture and heritage sites.

Heritage transport and active travel

The Transport Shed visitor centre, located within Dock Branch Park, responds to this need by creating a significant heritage attraction surrounded by green space, within an active travel corridor through the centre of Birkenhead. The Transport Shed is a purpose-built visitor centre that will house the National Museums Liverpool’s impressive transport collection. This flagship attraction is estimated to draw 150-200,000 visitors a year to the site.

“Dock Branch Park, with the Transport Shed at its heart, is an amazing project, which is an economic enabler with the potential to raise the land values of the area. It will also just create a really nice green place to be,” explains Liam.



BIRKENHEAD HERITAGE TRANSPORT AND ACTIVE TRAVEL

A key Town Deal project for Birkenhead, the Transport Shed creates a unique cultural offer and will give local residents and visitors from further afield, the opportunity to view and interact with important objects from the region's transport heritage, many of which have remained in storage until now. Cathy Palmer, Regeneration Delivery Lead at Wirral Council is optimistic about the ways in which the Transport Shed both recognises the importance of local transport heritage, while creating a focal point within Dock Branch Park, encouraging new, active forms of travel.

“We hope to be able to showcase this nationally-significant collection alongside the existing collection housed at the Wirral Transport Museum. We'd like to see many more visitors come over from Liverpool on the ferry across the Mersey, making use of the soon to be enhanced connections down to the Waterfront, to tell the story of Birkenhead past and future.”

Breathing new life into Birkenhead

With investment from the Birkenhead Town Deal and other government-backed funding sources, the town is moving closer to a new, ambitious vision for the future, to be realised through the Birkenhead 2040 Framework. With investment comes the opportunity to carve out new and essential green spaces within the town to improve health and quality of life for its residents. This time taking inspiration from New York in the form of the High Line, Birkenhead's new linear park is designed to bring wildlife, leisure and heritage to the tracks of a disused railway line that runs right through the centre of Birkenhead and will be home to the Transport Shed.

There has not been a local plan for Birkenhead since 1947. By bringing diverse communities on the journey, right from the outset, the council has generated a shared vision for Birkenhead in 2040 that has everyone excited about the future of their town.



Artist's impression of the Transport Shed, Birkenhead © Wirral Council

This story was written from conversations with Liam Kelly, Chief Executive of Make CIC, Chair of Baltic Triangle CIC and member of Birkenhead Town Deal Board; and Cathy Palmer, Regeneration Delivery Lead at Wirral Council.

Birkenhead is one of 101 places invited by the government to develop Town Deal proposals to deliver long-term economic recovery, clean growth, jobs and prosperity as part of the £3.6 billion Towns Fund.

Birkenhead submitted a successful Town Investment Plan and secured a Town Deal of up to £25 million. Birkenhead is currently developing business cases to take forward its Town Deal proposals.



SWINDON

CREATIVITY REIGNITING THE CIVIC HEART

SWINDON CREATIVITY REIGNITING THE CIVIC HEART

Listening to unheard voices

Shahina Johnson MBE is a member of the Swindon Cultural Quarter Steering Group, and Artistic Director and Chief Executive of Create Studios. A thriving film production company, Create Studios supports and trains new talent into the industry and has a history in Swindon that spans over 35 years. Shahina is one of the people leading change in Swindon and is part of a diverse community that is passionate about renewing Swindon's cultural heritage while also making the town centre an inclusive welcoming place to be.

“Swindon is benefiting from the Town Deal investment and that’s fantastic. It’s building on an established track record of expertise and ambition from our cultural organisations, heritage partners and the development teams.”

Shahina, who trained in Swindon, reflects on what inspires her to play a leadership role in the cultural sector: “I am an Asian woman, and there was no one who looked or sounded like me working in the arts and certainly not in the media when I was growing up. So, when I look at our programming and model of working - which is centred on diverse talent development, it completely motivates me.”

Talent development, training and opportunity are at the heart of the Create Studios model. “I know that if you give a young person an opportunity to train, particularly a person whose voice may not ordinarily be heard, it actually makes a difference, because I’ve seen the difference in my life,” says Shahina.



Shahina Johnson with Create Co-Directors Marilyn Fitzgerald and Gurchetan Singh and the Create team © Elmar Rubio for Create Studios

Create Studio is a social enterprise model that generates income and offers employment opportunities by delivering media production for partners as diverse as Chelsea FC and English Heritage. Shahina is proud of the hundreds of young people who have come through Create Studios over the years and of the work the organisation does to support the cultural ecosystem in Swindon.

“We’re recognised nationally for the work we’re doing here in Swindon, as one of four National Portfolio Organisations in the town, recognised and funded by Arts Council England,” says Shahina. “We’re really committed to supporting Swindon’s ambition for the regeneration of the town centre and its cultural offer. There’s excellent work happening, which is being acknowledged both locally and nationally. We’re focused on building the fabric and the infrastructure to really support that work.”



SWINDON CREATIVITY REIGNITING THE CIVIC HEART

Reigniting the town centre

Swindon is a well-connected town in southwest England with a rich heritage of innovation, technology and railway infrastructure. It is home to the National Trust headquarters and the National Archives and is characterised by committed, resourceful and creative people. Yet in recent years there has been a hollowing out of the town centre, with investment drawn to its outskirts. Across the borough there has also been a drop in residents aged 25 - 30, with many taking the short journey to cities close by such as London and Bristol.

Create Studios aims to change that trend. “We want to see more young people that are aspirational and have civic pride, using the digital creative industries to explore a career for themselves so they don’t feel they have to move away to London or Bristol to develop that career,” explains Shahina.

A new heritage home for the creative digital industries

A strategic intent of the Swindon Town Investment Plan (TIP) is to focus on reigniting the town centre and bringing people back to what was historically the beating heart of Swindon. “The civic focus of a town should be where everything is thriving. Ultimately, people’s perceptions of a town are wrapped up in the centre of a place and I think that’s why we want to focus our investment in the centre of Swindon,” explains Sam Rackham, Town Centre Development Project Manager at Swindon Borough Council. The Swindon Town Deal provides an opportunity to develop a permanent home for Create Studios in the Carriage Works in the centre of town, while also improving the transport and connectivity into the centre.

Built in the late 1800s as part of the GWR railway infrastructure, once the largest industrial site in Europe, the Carriage Works is an important asset within Swindon’s Heritage Action Zone (HAZ). The HAZ initiative from Historic England is seeking to revitalise Swindon’s historic Railway Village, originally built to provide housing for GWR employees. The Carriage Works buildings are being steadily transformed for life in the 21st century. With funding from the Swindon Town Deal, a previously vacant unit is set to house a purpose-built facility for Create Studios.

The town centre location will welcome people from all backgrounds to participate in creative activities, right in the centre of Swindon. With Town Deal backing the project aims to double participation and engagement within five years, and double the audiences for digital media exhibitions, with the development of new exhibition and screening spaces in the town.

“Now we’re able to make fit-for-purpose, accessible, funky premises for people like me, who didn’t see themselves in places like that when they were growing up, to train and enter the high-growth digital creative industries. When people come in, they’ll see diversity and they’ll see role models that they can relate to,”

The scheme will see Shahina and her team bring innovative digital technologies to a historic location.



SWINDON CREATIVITY REIGNITING THE CIVIC HEART

Create has continued to forge connections and highlight Swindon's cultural heritage, making the Carriage Works a fitting home. "For us to be in a heritage building feels really natural," explains Shahina.

"One of our projects is working with 12 young people to make a documentary about the history of the Health Hydro and its refurbishment to bring it back into use. We're kind of pioneers for the digital creative industries here in Swindon, so it's exciting to be bringing that innovation to the Carriage Works."

Also located within the Railway Village, the Health Hydro in Swindon was built in the 1890s by a generation of industrious pioneers, who worked on the railways and built many significant heritage sites in the town. The Health Hydro was one of the first public health and wellbeing centres in the country and will be refurbished with funds from the Swindon Town Deal, creating a unique leisure and visitor attraction. As a centrepiece for the wider regeneration of the HAZ, it is hoped that the experiences on offer will help change perceptions of Swindon town centre.

Swindon is a treasure trove of heritage and new creative culture. By valuing and supporting young people, and with support from organisations and passionate individuals, the town is on a journey to reignite that pioneering, forward-thinking Swindon spirit.



Swindon Health Hydro Courtesy of Swindon Borough Council

This story was written from conversations with Shahina Johnson MBE, member of the Swindon Cultural Quarter Steering Group, and Artistic Director and Chief Executive of Create Studios; Sam Rackham, Town Centre Development Project Manager at Swindon Borough Council; and Karen Phimister, Heritage Action Zone Project Officer, Swindon Borough Council.

Swindon is one of 101 places invited by the government to develop Town Deal proposals to deliver long-term economic recovery, clean growth, jobs and prosperity as part of the £3.6 billion Towns Fund.

Swindon submitted a successful Town Investment Plan and secured a Town Deal of up to £19.5 million. Swindon is currently developing business cases to take forward its Town Deal proposals.



MABLETHORPE

A CENTRE FOR HEALTH INNOVATION

MABLETHORPE A CENTRE FOR HEALTH INNOVATION

“I don’t like injustice and I’m passionate about addressing inequalities, but I also see them as opportunities for change,” says Kim Barr, Neighbourhood Lead for Skegness and Coastal, Lincolnshire Community Health Services NHS Trust.

Mablethorpe is a seaside town with high levels of poor health and 58% of its working population describe themselves as inactive, compared to 20% in England. Kim’s engagement with Mablethorpe began almost two decades ago. As a specialist nurse she brought a wealth of experience working across primary and community care in England, and then set up and supported respiratory services and Hospital at Home, serving patients and residents in the area. In doing so, she has built strong connections with local communities and GPs. Kim was then nominated to work with King’s College London to support Lincolnshire’s frailty agenda. Using the new e-frailty index tool, alongside GP and community nurse intelligence in Mablethorpe, she and her team developed a way of identifying a common language to describe dependency and needs of patients. The outcome was the creation of a platform to support early interventions and deliver more proactive care for people living with mild, moderate and severe frailty.

“When the job of Neighbourhood Lead came up in 2018 as part of the Better Care Fund, I thought, wow, this is a fantastic opportunity for me to give back and help people work together and integrate in the Skegness and Mablethorpe area.”



Courtesy of Mablethorpe Town Investment Plan

Kim returned to Mablethorpe for the role and even with her prior knowledge of the local health patterns, was shocked by the frailty indicators she found. “People came with their illnesses. They didn’t develop them here. People come for a better quality of life, but actually they come with huge health burdens and suddenly they’re miles away from any support mechanisms.”

Kim, along with Lydia Rusling, Assistant Director for Economic Growth for East Lindsey District Council and the wider Town Deal team, are delivering plans to regenerate Mablethorpe. They are working together to overcome one of Mablethorpe’s greatest challenges by creating an asset for the wider community with the Campus for Future Living project. Kim continues, “the Towns Fund created the perfect opportunity to uplift the health outlook for the town and improve people’s lives.”



MABLETHORPE A CENTRE FOR HEALTH INNOVATION

The Campus for Future Living is a health focal point for local partners

With a desire to improve the health and wellbeing of their local residents, the Campus for Future Living sits at the heart of Mablethorpe's Town Investment Plan.

"The idea for the Campus for Future Living is responding directly and proactively to all the reasons why we couldn't grow Mablethorpe economically, in terms of skills and health, education and opportunity in general," explains Lydia. "It will include a centre that will provide a base for the development and testing of Meditec applications. The wider campus will support continued professional development of clinicians, with both clinical and non-clinical medical placements, strongly aligned to the new medical school at the University of Lincoln. There will be the opportunity for training and development of care entrepreneurs. The Campus for Future Living will also facilitate a self-employed 'Care Network' of carers, and an adjacent building will provide accommodation to support and attract trainees during their stay."

The ambition for the Campus for Future Living is to promote job creation, self-employment opportunities and help fill vacancies for clinicians locally; while becoming a destination for health and social care training. The initiative will also engage local partners including Ageing Better and others.

"We've been able to leverage discussions with Health Education England, the University of Lincoln, University of Nottingham and the local NHS Clinical Commissioning Group. It's such a range of partners that are all focused on improving lives, not just in Mablethorpe, but acting as a catalyst for change for the whole of the UK."

Connecting with communities

"The combination of the Towns Fund itself, the work to engage with the local community and our partners, and the idea for the Campus for Future Living have all combined to be an immensely strong magnet," says Lydia. It is already leading to opportunities for academic research, funding bids and wider opportunities to pilot new ways of working based in Mablethorpe. Meanwhile, the connection to the local community is key.

Yet there are challenges to engaging communities in Mablethorpe, including low levels of digital literacy, further highlighted during the Covid-19 pandemic. And a sentiment within some communities of being over-consulted, with little action ever taking place. Drawing on existing relationships built by Kim and others, the local authority and Town Deal Board have listened to the needs of local people. "At the start of 2020 we kick-started a programme of community engagement to hear from the people of Mablethorpe; some of the comments were from people who have health problems and need care. But that's not where it ends, there are loads of young families that need a better service," explains Lydia Rusling. The Campus for Future Living has created an opportunity to work collectively to respond to the needs of the local community.

"It's not just going to be a specialist academic learning centre. It's going to be something that can be used by the locals, with meeting rooms for local groups and where people can benefit from social activities," concludes Kim.



MABLETHORPE A CENTRE FOR HEALTH INNOVATION

Working together for healthier futures

Led by a coalition of local, regional and national partners, the development of the Campus for Future Living will position Mablethorpe as the centre of a new cluster of health and care-related jobs and businesses, drawing in the support of Nottingham Trent and Lincoln Universities. Health Education England and the National Centre for Rural Health and Care have also both committed to work with the site as a national test bed for innovation in health. The Campus for Future Living has the potential to significantly improve the lives of the citizens of Mablethorpe yet have a national influence and impact.



Artist's impression of Campus for Future Living, Mablethorpe
© East Lindsey District Council

This story was written from conversations with Kim Barr, Neighbourhood Lead for Skegness and Coastal, Lincolnshire Community Health Services NHS Trust; and Lydia Rusling, Assistant Director for Economic Growth for East Lindsey District Council.

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Mablethorpe submitted a successful Town Investment Plan and secured a Town Deal of up to £23.9 million. Mablethorpe is currently developing business cases to take forward its Town Deal proposals.



LINCOLN AND SCARBOROUGH

APPROACHES TO EMBEDDING CARBON NET ZERO AMBITIONS

LINCOLN AND SCARBOROUGH APPROACHES TO EMBEDDING CARBON NET ZERO AMBITIONS

Our Town Stories Conversations brings together towns to discuss a shared topic at the heart of their Towns Fund experience.

This latest 'Conversation' highlights approaches to embedding carbon net zero ambitions through the Town Deal with Kate Bell, Climate Change Manager at Lincoln Council; Alex Richards, Head of Economic Development and Regeneration Services and Harry Barros, Climate Change and Carbon Reduction Officer at Scarborough Borough Council.

Kate Bell (Kate), Lincoln: I'm Kate Bell, Climate Change Manager at Lincoln Council. I was involved with pairing the Town Investment Plan (TIP) with the climate agenda, on the basis that the city council declared a climate emergency back in 2019. My role has involved working with Towns Fund project leads to identify net zero carbon solutions for projects and help deliver on a commitment to reducing or decarbonising our public buildings within the city.

Alex Richards (Alex), Scarborough: I'm Alex Richards, Head of Economic Development and Regeneration Services at Scarborough Borough Council. I've been leading the team in terms of the Town Deal process. We put together the TIP and subsequent masterplan for Scarborough and Whitby which incorporate a number of carbon reduction initiatives, both directly and indirectly.

Harry Barros (Harry), Scarborough: Hello, I'm Harry Barros, Climate Change and Carbon Reduction Officer at Scarborough Borough Council. I worked with the counsellors to draw up our climate change strategy earlier this year. Part of it was focusing on making sure that the Town Deal projects include a carbon reduction focus.

Our Town Stories: Can you introduce some of the projects within your Town Deal that are enabling your Town to deliver on your Town's climate and sustainability targets?

Alex: Scarborough declared a climate change emergency in 2019, at about the same time as we started to develop the TIP. We've got a number of interventions in both Whitby and Scarborough which are very specifically targeted at carbon reduction. They include investment in local cycling and walking, and a plan that we've had for some years but haven't had the capacity to deliver. So through the Towns Fund, we will be mobilising elements of that.

We are establishing a low carbon transport interchange within Scarborough rail station which is part funded through the Town Deal and is drawing in significant other funding streams. It includes electric vehicle hire for your onward journey once you've arrived by train; a large electric vehicle charging hub; and also onward travel by bus. We're working with the local bus provider which is converting its fleet to fully electric within Scarborough. It all links to pedestrian and cycling journeys, and potentially electric scooters.

In Scarborough we're establishing the Green Construction Skills village. It's a bespoke construction training college within Scarborough which is going to deliver green construction training techniques and certification to existing and new entrants into the market.

In Whitby we are actually subsidising Broomfield Farm, a zero-carbon housing development site, which is seeking consent for circa 200 homes. We're looking to provide subsidy support for infrastructure to develop 60 zero carbon homes within the site. They will be eco-friendly, purpose-built homes with charging points, photovoltaics, superfast broadband, allowing people to work from home. All that sort of stuff.



LINCOLN AND SCARBOROUGH APPROACHES TO EMBEDDING CARBON NET ZERO AMBITIONS

Then we've got another 12 projects across the borough of varying scale. At least 11 of these are capital build projects and each incorporates carbon reduction technologies and modern construction techniques to mitigate climate change impact, both in terms of the construction and the lifecycle of those buildings.

Harry: When we declared a climate emergency in 2019 – we stated that we will be doing 'everything within our power' to be carbon-neutral by 2030. It's not saying that the whole borough is going to become neutral by 2030 but it does mean that we have to put the effort in to move towards climate net zero in everything we do. I'll be honest, when we were developing our climate change strategy, it was quite a separate work stream to what was going on in the Town Deal. Most of the work before now had been focused on the council as an organisation, as an authority itself. But there is a widening acknowledgement from both staff and Members that it does have to be broader.

Kate: In Lincoln, when we declared a climate emergency, we took the decision to set a very ambitious target of reducing Lincoln's area-wide emissions to net zero by 2030. The reason for that was when we looked at the emissions the council has control of, it was less than 1% of our area-wide emissions.

So for us, the priority is establishing a partnership arrangement, working with the universities, hospitals, the big emitters, residents and businesses to look at how we can work collectively to reduce those emissions. And that's where opportunities like the Town's Fund come in.

Some of those projects are city council projects such as council buildings. Others are the responsibility of the county council, National Highways, the university, Lincoln College and the NHS in Lincoln so it was a perfect opportunity to bring them together to look at what the projects were in the round and identify where we can specifically make a difference.



Image found on other sites credited to freepik.com

LINCOLN AND SCARBOROUGH APPROACHES TO EMBEDDING CARBON NET ZERO AMBITIONS

There are two strands to this: the first is those public buildings that have in some cases been sitting empty for a very long time. We wanted to bring them back into use, but they're challenging buildings because most of them are listed. The Town Deal created an opportunity to use the funding and associated skills of the Towns Fund partnerships to learn about how we can refurbish existing buildings and reduce carbon emissions.

The other strand, similar to Scarborough's, is transport-related where we've got some real opportunities. Other infrastructure work that's been going on over the years means we can begin to connect up our cycling and walking networks by creating green corridors within key city centre areas.

Our Town Stories: the surface transport sector presents a particular challenge to reaching carbon net zero with emissions still growing in this sector. How are you addressing this at a local level through your Town Investment Plans?

Kate: In fact, in Lincoln, the emissions have been very slowly reducing in the transport sector although they remain stubborn compared to other areas where they have been reducing more significantly.

In Lincoln you've got very tight spaces; roads that were built in the 1960s and 70s that were focused on the car, not the pedestrian. So, it's about turning that on its head. The Towns Fund creates an opportunity to invest in reconfiguring those routes. It's not something we could have done 10 years ago because we needed wider infrastructure in place to move cars out of the city centre, and then prioritise pedestrian and cycling groups. Then there are the economic benefits of bringing people back into the city centre on foot and using public transport.

Harry: We also have very stubborn transport emissions. They're about 40% of our carbon footprint according to the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy data and they've been stagnant for about 10 years now. Everything else is coming down, so it's something that we know we need to address.

We have a couple of big challenges with transport that are hard to grapple with. One is the general connectivity of the region. Our trains and buses aren't necessarily as connected as we would want them to be. We've got two Park and Rides for Scarborough that are not very well utilised. Then, in terms of car parking in the town itself, we have thinking to do as we as a council generate a fair chunk of revenue from car parking. This means that a move to discourage car travel is a move to discourage income for the council as well.

Alex: We're a two-tier authority and the borough council is not responsible for transport although, as Harry says, one of our biggest contributing factors to climate emissions is transport and we have aspirations to change that. Our highways authority, the county council, is moving at a different pace and has different priorities within different towns.

But fundamentally without the injection of cash from the Town Deal, and without the partners which that investment has subsequently brought to the table, we wouldn't be able to do any of this. The Town Deal has made it possible to prioritise low carbon transport and investment in Scarborough whereas previously, we were further down the list for future investment. This was in part due to our peripherality, and the low take-up of electric vehicles within the borough itself but this funding has changed the game for the key partners to come on board.

Kate: I really agree with what Alex and Harry have just said as we're in a very similar position in Lincoln. We're a two-tier authority and we have explored funding with our county council highways and National Highways colleagues over the last 10 years and we work very closely together. However, it's these funding opportunities, like the Town Deal, that bring us together. So, without those opportunities, we wouldn't be able to work together as effectively as we do. That's really important.



LINCOLN AND SCARBOROUGH APPROACHES TO EMBEDDING CARBON NET ZERO AMBITIONS

Our Town Stories: within your roles in local government, in what way have you been able to act as facilitators, supporting change through creating the right conditions at a local level?

Kate: For us it is about acting as a community leader. We are not responsible for everybody's carbon emissions across the city and no local authority is, but if we don't work together, there will be no chance we'll achieve a 2030 or even a 2050 target. But it's our ability, as a district council, to have direct relationships with our residents and our businesses who we have that close connection with, so we're in a really good position to engage and get people on board. If we all act in isolation we won't deliver as much, so the Town Deal is crucial for bringing people together.

Alex: As a district authority, as Kate just said, we have the on-the-ground relationship with business and other public sector agencies within the town. It's our role, as a district, to deliver economic development and that involves talking to everybody all the time. We are the gel that brings people to the table and keeping them there is the opportunity.

In Scarborough we've got our bus service operator willing to invest in its fleet as a quid pro quo for the development of the transport interchange; a third sector organisation bringing construction skills training and enabling conventional construction companies to redirect trading into modern pre-construction technologies and techniques; and lastly, a housing developer that had no intention of developing zero carbon housing on the site prior to these conversations. We've now created a partnership that's brought the private sector together with the public sector to deliver the best benefit and outcome for the community and the climate.

Our Town Stories: In what ways have you been able to involve local residents in this work?

Kate: We've been engaging with residents over several years around what climate change means to them and what impact it will have on the environment. Likewise, we've discussed how we as a local authority can help them reduce their own carbon emissions.

We've had a series of workshops with residents, specifically on our climate action plan and our carbon declaration to understand what our residents want us to deliver and vice versa. We've also had climate assemblies, where we've asked a small group of people to come together to scrutinise what we're doing more specifically on carbon emissions. They are there to hold us to account for what we've said we will deliver and question how our policies are integrated so that we can work together to make sure we achieve it. Like all authorities, we're not perfect and it's about perfecting that over the next few years.

Harry: In putting together the formal climate change strategy, we went to parish and town councils, the third sector and community organisations and tapped into their knowledge and networks. That was a useful two-way conversation as we became aware of what else we could do and acknowledged the role of community action for example. At the same time, we were also able to share information with community groups about how they might decarbonise community buildings.



LINCOLN AND SCARBOROUGH APPROACHES TO EMBEDDING CARBON NET ZERO AMBITIONS

Our Town Stories: What has been your experience around measuring impact - both of climate change in your place, and the interventions you are putting in place to mitigate climate change?

Kate: We are grappling with this area, as I know every local authority is. So, what we decided to do with our district councils in the rest of Lincolnshire, and the county council, was to prepare a carbon toolkit. It's a toolkit that's specific to our local area with all the datasets in one place so we can adjust the levers on it. For example, we can find out, say, the carbon emissions to retrofit a percentage of private sector housing in the city or public buildings in the city; or assess the impact of increasing cycling and walking routes.

We worked with consultants to define those measures to make sure the calculations were as accurate as they could be, and that they're based on the right datasets. We needed to monitor progress and what we're achieving with our central Lincolnshire Local Plan as carbon emissions and climate change measures are embedded into it. In order to deliver, we need to be able to monitor progress and what we're achieving.

The data has also helped us secure additional funding through the Public Sector Decarbonisation fund, for example, and we can match that funding with Towns Fund money. We can use the data to demonstrate the outcome if we secure additional capital funding, for instance, for air source heat pumps, and what that would deliver in carbon savings. Monitoring how you're performing towards a net zero target, and particularly to secure funding is absolutely essential.

Harry: I agree it's really challenging to do. There are explicit calculators so it's very easy to put in your inputs and get your outputs but it's difficult to get accurate figures, and we've found it quite difficult so far to really get quantitative measures. Qualitative data is much easier, as it's much easier to describe the general areas in which projects are going to have an impact. But that's never been an obstacle for us as we know we are doing the right thing, whether or not we've got the numbers for it.

Our public buildings are one area where we have the best data. Similarly we were successful in the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme bid at the start of the year and that required a good level of data - heat loss surveys and all that kind of modelling.

Our Town Stories: What advice would you give to other towns or borough councils who are committed to working towards achieving net zero? What's the most important thing they should focus on?

Harry: In North Yorkshire we have a group of climate lead officers that regularly talk with each other sharing experiences, thoughts, plans, projects, etc. We are also here to listen to anyone who has ideas that can be implemented.

Kate: For me, it's around sharing knowledge and information between local authorities and it's really useful to talk to Scarborough. I'm very fond of Scarborough, I know it very well so I know exactly the type of buildings you're talking about, the geography and some of the challenges.

But through the Towns Fund, we've had an opportunity to connect with other local authorities miles away from Lincoln that we wouldn't have come into contact with, and then we shared information, policies and all sorts of useful information between us. So my advice would be to reach out to other local authorities because we're all going through exactly the same challenges and you don't need to reinvent the wheel. There are things that some authorities have tried and tested that in my experience, they have been very willing to share.

This conversation was held on 17 November 2021 between Kate Bell, Climate Change Manager at Lincoln Council; Alex Richards, Head of Economic Development and Regeneration Services at Scarborough Borough Council and Harry Barros, Climate Change and Carbon Reduction Officer at Scarborough Borough Council and hosted by Our Town Stories.

Lincoln and Scarborough are two of 101 places with Town Deal investment from the government to develop and deliver projects that support long-term economic recovery, regeneration, clean growth, jobs and prosperity for their Towns. The 101 Town Deals are worth more than £2.4bn in total and are part of the £3.6bn Towns Fund.

