



Towns Fund Board

Minutes - 27 November 2020

Attendance

Members of the Towns Fund Board

Ninder Johal (Chair)	Owner, Nachural
Stuart Anderson MP	Member of Parliament for Wolverhampton South West
Simon Archer	Director, Bilston BID
Katherine Clough	Director of External Engagement, University of Wolverhampton
Mal Cowgill	Principal and Chief Executive, City of Wolverhampton College
James Crowter	Managing Director, Tecman
Ro Hands	Owner, Learn Play Foundation
James Holland	General Manager, Collins Aerospace
Tim Johnson	Chief Executive, City of Wolverhampton Council (CWC)
Josie Kelly	Chief Executive Officer, Access 2 Business
Pat McFadden MP	Member of Parliament for Wolverhampton South East
Maninder Mangat	Director, MM Consulting
Ben Reid	Board Member, International Co-Op Alliance
Kevin Rogers	Executive Director, Paycare
Amit Sharma	Director, INCO
Cherry Shine	Director, Wolverhampton BID
Councillor Stephen Simkins	Cabinet Member for City Economy, CWC
Jane Stevenson MP	Member of Parliament for Wolverhampton North East
Patricia Willoughby	Head of Policy (Housing & Regeneration), West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA)
Tutsi	Youth Council Representative
Ruby	Youth Council Representative

In Attendance

Mark Birks	Principal, Land and Development, Avison Young
Ross Cook	Director of City Environment, CWC
Shelley Humphries	Democratic Services Officer, CWC
Richard Lawrence	Director of Regeneration, CWC
Tony Marvell	Programme Manager, CWC
Michelle Nutt	Area Director, BEIS
Harinder Sangha	Project Assistant, CWC
Andrew Scragg	Youth Service Participation Worker, CWC
Fiona Woolston	Senior Account Manager, Copper Consultancy

Item No. *Title*

- 1 Apologies for absence**
Apologies were received from Professor Geoff Layer, Vice Chancellor of University of Wolverhampton and Councillor Ian Brookfield, Leader of the Council.
- 2 Notification of substitute members**
Katharine Clough, University of Wolverhampton attended for Professor Geoff Layer.

3 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest made.

4 **Minutes of the meeting of 25 September 2020**

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting of 25 September 2020 be approved as a correct record.

5 **Matters arising**

There were no matters arising from the minutes of the previous meeting.

6 **Towns Fund Action Tracker**

Tony Marvell, Programme Manager, City of Wolverhampton Council (CWC) presented the Towns Fund Action Tracker which outlined the outcomes of actions agreed at the last meeting.

Resolved:

That the outcomes from the actions agreed at the meeting of 25 September 2020 be noted.

7 **National Towns Fund Update**

Michelle Nutt, Area Director, BEIS provided a verbal update on the National Towns Fund. It was noted there was little to report as the final outcomes of funding bids had not yet been announced for Tranche One of the National Programme, which included Wolverhampton.

Partners were advised that ministers were in the process of fixing a date for this. Help was offered from Board members to try and hasten the process however it was noted that the decision lay with ministers and all that could be done in this respect was to await an outcome.

It was noted that in the meantime, the Key Projects would be examined to determine priority ready to move forward once funding was announced.

Resolved:

That the National Towns Fund Update be received.

8 **Towns Fund Capital Accelerator Grant**

Ross Cook, Director for City Environment, CWC provided a verbal update and delivered a presentation in relation to the use of the Towns Fund Capital Accelerator Grant. It was noted that the funding needed to be spent by 31 March 2021 and a brief overview of work undertaken to date was provided.

Projects within the City Centre and Bilston were reported as on target for delivery in March 2021. A meeting had been held with traders on 26 November 2020 to agree the scope of works planned for the Wednesfield area and thanks were extended to all traders who participated.

Thanks were also recorded to the team at Bilston BID for their engagement programme with local traders.

It was noted that hoardings had been installed to cover areas of the City Centre that required improvement. An update on further progress would be provided at the next meeting.

Thanks were offered by partners and noted that it was encouraging to see engagement with Bilston and Wednesfield stakeholders and to ensure projects were ready to hit the ground running. The Chair commended the work done to date.

Resolved:

That the Towns Fund Capital Accelerator Grant update be received.

9 **Communications and Engagement Plan**

Fiona Woolston, Copper Consultancy delivered a presentation outlining the construction of the Towns Fund Stakeholder and Engagement Plan. The presentation provided an overview of the timeline and plans for delivery.

It was noted that the plan was to be implemented in stages to allow for the possibility that the funding supplied may not cover all 11 Key Projects. The first stage was being developed to correlate with Project Relight.

The main goal was to engage with the groups and communities that the Key Projects were likely to affect to gain an understanding at grass roots level. Extensive research had been conducted around past stakeholder and community engagement projects to construct a best practice approach by learning from previous methods.

It was acknowledged that effective communication of expected delivery timelines would be beneficial to ensure public understanding of perceived overlong timescales. Being mindful of 'consultation fatigue' was important to note so the public did not tire of the same messages.

It was also important to ensure that there was not just one Local Authority voice but many partner organisations and local business owners engaging with residents and communities. This would ensure that residents could relate to the Key Projects being City initiatives owned by everyone. Project Champions would also be identified to support this.

It was outlined that next immediate steps would include an evaluation and it was planned that a first draft of the plan would be prepared by 11 December 2020 with an update on progress for the next meeting of Towns Fund Board.

In response to a query around funding for the consultancy involvement, it was noted that the Council would be providing the funding.

It was queried whether the plan had been formulated with the receipt of the full £48 million funding in mind. It was noted that 11 Key Projects formed the basis of the funding bid and that each project has been prioritised using factors such as match funding or deliverability. Should the full funding not be awarded, the projects could be split and reprioritised accordingly. The structure of the Stakeholder and Engagement Plan was designed in stages so plans could evolve as the full picture emerged.

In order to drive plans and decision making along swiftly, an extraordinary meeting of Towns Fund Board was requested should news of the funding arrive earlier than the next scheduled meeting on 29 January 2021.

It was reported that a Business Champions Meeting was being held on 6 December 2020 with a key set of stakeholders who may wish to know about the Stakeholder and Engagement Plans; Fiona Woolston offered to attend if that would be helpful.

It was noted that partners needed to be mindful of perceptions should some City areas lose out because of some projects being reprioritised and how to manage expectations until plans were crystallised. It was queried whether Wednesfield / areas of perceived neglect could be ringfenced.

It was also noted that it was important that the projects ensured visibility and showcased the City's potential to prospective investors.

A number of queries were raised around when to inform ward members of the progress of projects and it was advised that this would be communicated as soon as it was known what funding was available and which projects would be taken forward.

In response to a query around the use of the in-house communications team, it was noted that the team were excellent although Copper Consultancy had experience of what Central Government required from an engagement plan.

Resolved:

1. That the update on the Towns Fund Stakeholder and Engagement Plan be noted.
2. That a first draft of the Towns Fund Stakeholder and Engagement Plan would be prepared by 11 December 2020 with an update on progress for the next meeting of Towns Fund Board.
3. That an extraordinary meeting of Towns Fund Board be arranged should news of the funding arrive earlier than the next scheduled meeting on 29 January 2021.

10 **Future High Streets Fund**

Richard Lawrence, Director of Regeneration, CWC provided a short verbal update on the Future High Streets Fund and reported that everything was in hand for match funding with the City Centre West being the first area of main focus. Further information was awaited however plans were in position once the outcome of the funding application was received.

Resolved:

That the verbal update on the Future High Streets Fund be received.

11 **Residential Market Update**

Guest speaker Mark Birks, Principal - Land and Development, of Avison Young delivered a presentation which provided an overview of the current status of the residential market with a series of graphs to illustrate Wolverhampton's performance against national figures in all areas of the market.

Key points included that house sales in Wolverhampton had kept pace with national figures, with all taking a dip during the first and second national lockdown period. It

was noted that Wolverhampton recovered post-lockdown period showing the resiliency of the market. Wolverhampton also tracked the national average for annual inflation pre-COVID and emerged from lockdown stronger than the national average once restrictions eased in June 2020.

In terms of buying to rent, it was noted that the market was flourishing in Birmingham and Wolverhampton was predicted to follow suit. It was noted that rent costs to the tenant typically made up 30% of the average salary.

The presentation included an outline of the Horseley Fields development and it was noted that that was one of many that would potentially attract more people to the City.

In response to a query around developing the heritage buildings in and around Queen's Square into rented accommodation, it was advised that this would be an excellent opportunity at a later stage however such properties would need to be rented at premium rate to cover costs and the initial focus was around affordability.

It was noted that the University of Wolverhampton attracted students from around the worked and it was important to ensure retention of skilled graduates by offering affordable housing and providing a reason to remain. It was thought that the current offer for student accommodation was also poor quality however the University Strategy that was under development was to include something to address this. It was agreed that there needed to be an offer to bridge the gap between private rented sector and student accommodation.

Resolved:

That the presentation of the Residential Market Update from Avison Young be received.

12

Any Other Business

The Chair encouraged all partners to communicate the ongoing Shop Local campaign through all networking channels to support local businesses over this difficult period. It was noted that if each person spent an additional £5.00 a week locally this would boost the local economy by £780,000 a week.

The Chair wished all a Merry Christmas and ended with the thought that the New Year would bring hope for an end to the pandemic.