

# Minutes

MEETING: Oldham Town Centre Board

DATE: 20 September 2024

VENUE: Oldham Council Training Room 3, Spindles Shopping Centre, Oldham

TIME: 13:00

<b>PRESENT</b>	Abrahams, MP Debbie	Oldham East and Saddleworth Constituency
	Ashraf, Kashif	President of Oldham Chamber of Commerce, Greater Manchester Chamber / Co-Founder and Co-Chair, Asian Business Leaders
	Bennett, Katie	Manager, Spindles Town Square Shopping Centre
	Brown, Richard	Relationship Manager, Arts Council England
	Clifford, Paul	Director of Economy, Oldham Council
	Cotton, Maria	Assistant Director for Strategic Property, Investment and Place Making, Oldham Council
	Da Silva, Anna	Chief Executive Officer, Northern Roots
	Harban, Rachel	Town Centre Business Manager, Oldham Council
	Hughes, Margaret	Owner, Zutti Fashion <b>(Vice-Chair)</b>
	Knight, Paul	Customer Experience Consultant, First Choice Homes Oldham
	Lees-Jones, William	Managing Director, JW Lees & Co. <b>(Chair)</b>
	Lewis, Chris	Senior Youth Work Manager, Oldham Council
	Lockwood, Stuart	Chief Executive, Oldham Community Leisure
	Penn, Jennifer	Town Centre Business Manager, Oldham Council
	Raghvani, Prem	Member, Oldham Youth Council
	Rothwell, Frank	Chairman and Owner, Oldham Athletic F.C.
	Vogel, Alex	Senior Development Manager, Muse
	Wharton, Jake	Communications Officer, Oldham Council
	Wood, Rachel	Cultural Partnerships Manager, Oldham Council
<b>APOLOGIES</b>	Ali, Councillor Mohon	Cabinet Member for Education and Skills, Oldham Council
	Catherall, Harry	Chief Executive, Oldham Council
	Davison, Dylan	Member, Oldham Youth Council
	Hussain, Councillor Fida	Cabinet Member for Enterprise, Oldham Council
	Jordan, Simon	Principal and Chief Executive, Oldham College
	Lightfoot, Andrew	Deputy Chief Executive, Greater Manchester Combined Authority
	McLoughlin, Anne	Interim CEO, First Choice Homes Oldham
	McMahon, MP Jim	Oldham West, Chadderton and Royton Constituency
	Patterson, John	Chief Clinical Officer, NHS Oldham CCG

	Rahim, Fazal	Project Coordinator, Oldham Interfaith Forum
	Riley, Michelle	Owner, Cob and Coal Tap / Fox and Pine
	Shah, Councillor Arooj	Leader and Cabinet Member for Building a Better Oldham, Oldham Council
	Taylor, Steve	Chief Officer, Northern Care Alliance
	Windsor-Welsh, Laura	Oldham Director, Action Together
	Yousaf, Adnan	Real Estate Manager, The Cross Group, Chambers Business Centre

### **1. Introductions and apologies for absence (William Lees-Jones)**

Introductions were made and apologies were noted.

### **2. Welcome (William Lees-Jones)**

Housekeeping items were covered and new and returning members were welcomed.

### **3. Notice of any urgent business to be accepted onto the agenda and reasons for that urgency (William Lees-Jones)**

None.

### **4. Declarations of Interests (William Lees-Jones)**

The Chair thanked everyone who had declared their interests for a new register at [oldham.gov.uk](http://oldham.gov.uk). No further interests were declared, and the existing declarations were noted:

Kashif Ashraf: Managing Director, KNA Partnership Limited. Member of Chadderton Town Board, Public Sector Reform Board, Economy Board, Employment and Skills Partnership, Cultural Partnership Board, Focus-Trust Board, Bank of England Citizens Panel, and Oldham Mayor's Appeal Committee. Oldham President, Greater Manchester Chamber of Commerce. Member and Judge, NPH Ethnic Minority Business and Policy Forum. Poverty Truth Commissioner, Action Together. Joint Chair and Founder, Asian Business Leaders.

Anna Da Silva: Chief Executive Officer, Northern Roots.

William Lees-Jones: Managing Director, JW Lees & Co.

Stuart Lockwood: Board of Directors, Northern Roots, and Chief Executive, Oldham Community Leisure.

Prem Raghvani: Director at Readyfile Limited. Member of Oldham Youth Council, Liberal Democrats, Oldham Liberal Democrats, and Young Liberals.

Fazal Rahim: stall owner, Tommyfield Market.

Councillor Arooj Shah: owner of property within Oldham Town Centre Board delivery area.

### **5. Minutes of the previous meeting (William Lees-Jones)**

The minutes dated 8 March 2024 were agreed as a true record and approved for publication online at [oldham.gov.uk](http://oldham.gov.uk) (proposed by the Chair and seconded by the Vice-Chair).

#### **6. Review of actions from the previous meeting (William Lees-Jones)**

Paul Clifford and Frank Rothwell to discuss potential use of the Queen Elizabeth Hall for annual events after March 2025: *it has been agreed to extend bookings to June 2025.*

#### **7. Procedural business and any items accepted as urgent business (William Lees-Jones)**

Board members were thanked for sharing personal profiles and photographs for the Towns Fund page of the Oldham Council website. The information supplied will be managed in accordance with the privacy notice on the same website.

**ACTION:** Jennifer Penn to publish Board member profiles online by the next meeting.

The next Towns Fund monitoring return for April-September is due by 21 November.

**ACTION:** Jennifer Penn to share the Towns Fund monitoring return made in June 2024.

#### **8. Town centre update**

- **High Street Accelerator (Maggie Hughes)**

Maggie Hughes described her work as Chair of the High Street Accelerator Partnership. Established in February, the Partnership is a small but quality group of community leaders, business owners and youth representatives overseeing physical improvements to Yorkshire Street and Union Street, such as new CCTV, a heritage trail and artist murals on buildings.

The High Streets Task Force recently brought together the Partnership members and other stakeholders for a vision workshop to identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats on Yorkshire Street and Union Street specifically, and across the town centre more generally. A report and action plan will follow.

The Evening and Night-Time Economy (ENTE) Task Force continues to meet each month to support local businesses. Together, the representatives of licensed venues, taxi firms and cultural organisations are creating an action plan and targeting Purple Flag status for Oldham.

In October there will be a workshop at Billingtons, led by the High Streets Task Force. It will build on a successful visit from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government.

There are many positive developments along Yorkshire Street, including new shops selling groceries, desserts, and fabrics. Some landlords have invested in shopfronts and fixtures and fittings, and others have plans to open an aesthetic skin clinic and student flats/offices.

The Partnership is using its modest budget to pilot innovative projects and, importantly, test the theory that projects are most successful when designed and led by local people. The £50,000 provided for FY23/24 has been used to commission a town centre analysis incorporating Yorkshire Street and Union Street, the wider town centre, Alexandra Retail Park, and Elk Mill Retail Park, to understand current performance and opportunities for, and barriers to, growth. Board members are the first stakeholders to see the results, ahead of a presentation to an internal town centre strategy group next week. Some of the headline findings are below:

- Oldham has more cohesion with lower income groups than higher income groups.
- The town centre faces competition from Elk Mill (which has some of the same retailers e.g. Next and JD Sports), Alexandra Retail Park (which has an Iceland like the town centre, plus a leisure offer), Rochdale, Manchester, and the Trafford Centre. Selling the vision for the town centre is fundamental to encouraging retailers to operate town centre outlets alongside their other outlets.
- Oldham captures just 4% of possible local spend. Increasing that figure to 6% would represent an additional £21m of spend.
- Oldham outperforms in certain categories e.g. clothing and footwear and underperforms in others e.g. home/household items for gaming, camping, arts and crafts, music, etc).
- There is a limited food and beverage offer and dine-in operators underperform (although the opening of the Egyptian Room in October should help to address this).
- The leisure offer is strong but not packaged/promoted as extensively as it could be. Waymarkers could be bigger and better than at present.
- Popular brands that might be targeted include Sostrene Grene, Flying Tiger, Zara, and Hollywood Bowl. The data should help the Council to target aspirational brands and develop lettings strategies for the likes of the Old Town Hall.
- Relocating the market will further condense the compact retail core, increasing appeal.

**ACTION:** Maria Cotton to share the full town centre analysis and highlight the core messages for Board members to promote and share as ambassadors for the town.

It will be important to develop a dashboard combining quantitative and qualitative data to understand the full picture and respond to emerging themes; quantitative data alone cannot reveal people's perceptions of the town, awareness of what's on offer, views on transport, etcn

The current rebranding exercise for the town centre should help to address negative perceptions and affirm ambitions, whilst events should keep things dynamic.

At a recent meeting with Oldham Youth Council, Muse learned that young people would like to see new brands in the town centre, like Superdrug, Zara and Hollywood Bowl, plus arcades. There can be barriers to young people using existing shops and facilities e.g. higher ticket prices at Oldham Odeon compared to Rochdale Odeon.

**ACTION:** Maria Cotton to check for feedback from 18 to 25-year-olds in the town centre analysis.

**ACTION:** Anna da Silva and Maria Cotton to discuss ways of aligning the forthcoming Northern Roots marketing strategy with the town centre analysis and rebranding exercise.

- **Town Centre Perception Review and Safety Audit (Maria Cotton)**

Ten routes in the town centre were recently assessed for cleanliness and safety during the daytime and evening by Storecheckers. The average score was 70%. The routes scored highly for safety, signage, bins and rubbish, mostly achieving scores close to the national benchmark of 4 out of 5. Low scores were recorded for litter and condition of street furniture (with the latter possibly being impacted by plans for new furniture as part of Accessible Oldham). Evening walks took place from 19:00-21:00 and 21:00-23:00, with Yorkshire Street routes achieving the highest safety scores.

Quick wins may include painting lampposts to reveal CCTV locations and improving lighting.

Board members are asked to help ensure that headline findings reach the correct audiences.

**ACTION:** Maria Cotton to share the results of the town centre perception and safety audit, including a breakdown of the highest and lowest scoring routes walked by experts, to help Board members to use and promote the outcomes.

**ACTION:** Maria Cotton to explore sharing the town centre perception and safety audit outcomes with, and quantifying projected increases in footfall for, potential investors.

- **Communications and events (Jake Wharton)**

**Festival Oldham** – details were shared with businesses and market traders and adverts targeted populations in Greater Manchester, Saddleworth and West Yorkshire. There was live coverage on the day and Tommy Cannon was photographed with the new Oldham mural.

**Women’s Tour of Britain:** good use was made of Cycling Britain’s official branding tools. Partners along the route used Whatsapp to share pictures of live progress.

**Love your local market:** traders were interviewed for videos to complement the raffle and high street performances.

**20 years of Oldham Pride:** activities were held in the town centre and Queen Elizabeth Hall.

**Euros:** penalty shoot-out was held in conjunction with Oldham Community Leisure.

**Oldham Giftcard:** the launch event a fortnight ago involved an ad van, tombola and giveaways. There will be further campaigns in the coming months e.g. in district centres. The aim to lock spend into the town centre.

Over 45 businesses and market traders have signed up for free to accept the Oldham Giftcard (physical or digital) as payment for goods and services. Board members and businesses can access corporate packages for giving cards to staff or customers. Katie Bennett has already donated a giftcard to the Perfume Shop as a raffle prize. The only cost to a participating business is the transaction charge from Mastercard. Recipients can spend their cards in as many participating retailers as they like, on as many dates as they choose. Full details are online at: [townandcitygiftcards.com](http://townandcitygiftcards.com). The national scheme has 200 participating towns and is promoted extensively. Oldham Council has paid for a year’s membership and 5,000 physical giftcards. Anyone who gives or uses a giftcard is encouraged to share the news on social media using tags “Oldham Council” on X / “Love Oldham” on Facebook/Instagram.

**ACTION:** Maria Cotton to explore options for promotional emails, special edition e-giftcards, and promotions where extra credit is given at the time of topping up an Oldham Giftcard.

**ACTION:** Muse to provide a summary of the town centre development framework consultation during the next meeting, following a report to Cabinet in autumn.

**Coliseum:** the announcement about refurbishing the Fairbottom Street venue was accompanied by live music and performances. The BBC and ITV both covered the event and reported that the Coliseum will open in time for panto in December 2025.

## **9. Substantive business – Towns Fund**

### **1) Flexible performance space – Project Adjustment Request (Paul Clifford)**

Contractors have begun intrusive surveys and asbestos removal. Several contractors have submitted expressions of interest for the main works contract (start date January).

The operating model for the Coliseum is TBC but there are ambitions for a consortium approach across various assets and for the theatre to have an independent operator.

**RECORD OF VOTE:** Board members voted unanimously in favour of submitting a formal Project Adjustment Request (PAR) to Government to redirect the Towns Fund capital from the Union Street building to the former Oldham Coliseum Theatre on Fairbottom Street. Board members will review the PAR before submission to Government, and Oldham Council will inform the MP about the decision. A formal letter of support from the MP is not required.

**ACTION:** Paul Clifford to bring a detailed update on the theatre project to a future meeting.

## **2) Northern Roots (Anna da Silva)**

Planning permission was secured in summer for the visitor centre and forestry hub (amended application), and a phase of the farm to the south of the visitor centre (reserved matters application). Enabling works are nearly complete and the visitor centre will open early 2026.

The charity has engaged over 2,000 people since last meeting, from Oldham and further afield. The “Beautiful Oldham” project funded by Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) attracted 800 people and focused on simple fun like sports. It was developed and hosted by 15 community champions who have been exploring the site’s heritage. HLF has just provided a second grant for marketing. The farm has enjoyed its second harvest and there are weekly produce sales alongside cooking and beekeeping events, paid craft workshops, podcasts, and litter picks. The community garden is thriving thanks to the GM Environment Fund and there are five contracts around social prescribing. NHS England has invested for the first time as part of a national programme and Northern Roots is a case study for an EU-wide programme designed to make social prescribing mainstream. New funding is coming in for work with minority groups, and Northern Roots has been nominated for the GSK Impact Award (King’s Fund Award).

One major success story is that of a local young person from Fitton Hill who recently secured employment with a landscaping contractor following a volunteer placement at Northern Roots via Positive Steps. His job will see him return to work at Northern Roots as a paid employee.

## **3) Relocating Tommyfield Market (Maria Cotton)**

The market construction and allocations process are a third complete; the new structure is watertight and awaiting fixtures and fittings, and the contractor has ordered a new stall prototype following dissatisfaction with a previous supplier’s prototype. Stalls will vary by size, counter depth, and design e.g. metal stalls in the middle and white stone stalls around the edge for fresh produce stalls and cafes/takeaways. The new site will not have a gas supply and half of the market will have 3-phase electricity. The archives under the new market and the car parking levels in the shopping centre are just some of the design/extraction constraints.

Current market rents will apply in the new market. Traders can choose from 3-year and 6-year leases, with different rent review periods. Both options include annual break clauses.

All traders are being supported by the Growth Company to develop business plans, and some are working with a consultant on market branding.

The market is set to be fully let when it opens in spring. Relocating traders should take no more than five days. Once pre-lets are signed, trader details will be published on the market page at [oldham.gov.uk](http://oldham.gov.uk). The old market will be demolished to make way for a park/college.

**ACTION:** Maria Cotton to bring a detailed update on the market to the next meeting.

**ACTION:** Maria Cotton to recirculate the market trader scoring procedure confirming the categories against which applications for stalls were scored.

**4) Flexible workspace (Paul Clifford)**

With the Oldham Council offices now occupied and The Hive opening today, the Board has concluded its first Towns Fund project. Willmott Dixon recently won Environmental Project of the Year for the overall Spindles redevelopment at the National Project Excellence Awards.

**10. Action review / next steps (William Lees-Jones)**

See individual actions within the main body of minutes.

**11. Any other business (William Lees-Jones)**

Oldham Council is applying for £200,000 from Historic England's Regional Capacity Building Fund to produce a strategic vision for the historic environment of the Cultural Quarter in Oldham town centre, with an associated delivery plan to position vacant/underutilised heritage buildings as propositions for investment. The project will require match funding from GMCA (requested) and Oldham Council (confirmed).

**RECORD OF VOTE:** Board members voted unanimously in favour of endorsing an application by Oldham Council to Historic England for a project in the Cultural Quarter.

**12. Time and date of next meeting(s) (William Lees-Jones)**

13:00-15:00 on Friday, 15 November 2024 (venue TBC). The meeting closed at 14:50.