

Minutes

MEETING: Oldham Town Centre Board

DATE: 4 December 2023

VENUE: Crompton Suite, Civic Centre, Oldham

TIME: 13:00

PRESENT	Ashraf, Kashif	President of Oldham Chamber of Commerce, Greater Manchester Chamber / Co-Founder and Co-Chair, Asian Business Leaders
	Beckett, Jessica	Communications Manager, Oldham Council
	Bennett, Katie	Manager, Spindles Town Square Shopping Centre
	Benvie, Alan	Vice Principal - Student Experience and Inclusion, Oldham College
	Clifford, Paul	Director of Economy, Oldham Council
	Cotton, Maria	Head of Place Making, Oldham Council
	Craig, Dr. Alistair	Chief Officer, Northern Care Alliance
	Da Silva, Anna	Chief Executive Officer, Northern Roots Charity
	Hughes, Margaret	Owner, Zutti Fashion (Vice-Chair)
	Lees-Jones, William	Managing Director, J.W. Lees & Co. (Chair)
	Penn, Jennifer	Regeneration Officer, Oldham Council
	Popplewell, Grace	Greater Manchester Deputy Area Lead, Cities and Local Growth Unit
	Riley, Michelle	Owner, Cob and Coal Tap / Fox and Pine
	Robinson, Joanne	Regeneration Officer (Technical), Oldham Council
	Shah, Councillor Arooj	Leader, Oldham Council
	Webb, Kelly	Executive Director for Customer Experience, First Choice Homes Oldham
	Wood, Rachel	Creative Programmes and Event Manager, Oldham Council
	Yousaf, Adnan	Real Estate Manager, The Cross Group, Chambers Business Centre
APOLOGIES	Abrahams, MP Debbie	Oldham East and Saddleworth Constituency
	Ali, Councillor Mohon	Cabinet Member for Education and Skills, Oldham Council
	Aspinall, Gail	Capital Programme and Special Projects Manager, Oldham Council
	Barton, Emma	Executive Director for Place and Economic Growth, Oldham Council
	Bentham, Max	Development Director, Muse
	Beverley, Dr. Delroy	Chief Executive Officer, First Choice Homes Oldham
	Bloor, Jon	Assistant Director for Economic Growth, Oldham Council
	Catherall, Harry	Chief Executive, Oldham Council
	Courtie, Pete	Relationship Manager, Arts Council England
	Dad, Nasir	Director of Environment, Oldham Council
	Fletcher, Rebecca	Director of Public Health, Oldham Council
	Fraser, Nigel	Regeneration Team Leader (Capital Projects), Oldham Council

	Garrick, Jesse	Greater Manchester Area Lead, Cities and Local Growth Unit
	Henshaw, Luke	Representative, Oldham Youth Council
	Hussain, Councillor Fida	Cabinet Member for Business, Employment and Enterprise, Oldham Council
	Jordan, Simon	Principal, Oldham College
	Kipling, Shelley	Assistant Chief Executive, Oldham Council
	Knowles, Aaron	Greater Manchester Area Coordinator, Cities and Local Growth Unit
	Lewis, Chris	Senior Youth Work Manager, Oldham Council
	Lewis, Christopher	Strategic Lead for Creating a Better Place, Oldham Council
	Lightfoot, Andrew	Deputy Chief Executive, Greater Manchester Combined Authority
	Lockwood, Stuart	Chief Executive, Oldham Community Leisure
	McMahon, MP Jim	Oldham West and Royton Constituency
	Nicholson, Leo	Representative, Oldham Youth Council
	Patterson, John	Chief Clinical Officer, NHS Oldham CCG
	Rahim, Fazal	Project Coordinator, Oldham Interfaith Forum
	Rayner, MP Angela	Ashton-under-Lyne Constituency
	Roberts, Paul	Spindles Programme Director, Hive Projects
	Rogers, Stuart	Project Director, Muse
	Rothwell, Frank	Managing Director, Manchester Cabins / Chairman and Owner, Oldham Athletic F.C.
	Windsor-Welsh, Liz	Chief Executive, Action Together

ITEM	
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 Interest (William Lees-Jones) William Lees-Jones: Managing Director, J.W.Lees & Co. (owners of Tommyfield Inn) Anna da Silva: Chief Executive Officer, Northern Roots
5	Minutes of the previous meeting (William Lees-Jones) The minutes dated 12 September 2023 were agreed as a true record and approved for publication online at oldham.gov.uk .
6	Review of actions from the previous meeting (William Lees-Jones)

	Jennifer Penn to coordinate the publication of Board member profiles online: <i>process is getting underway with support from the Council's Information Governance Team.</i> Shelley Kipling to bring an economic assessment of town centre and other major events from the past year to a future meeting, including footage/photos: <i>Rachel Wood to cover during agenda item nine.</i> The Leader of the Council to discuss tackling anti-social behaviour in Oldham town centre with Greater Manchester Police: <i>Maria Cotton to provide an update during agenda item eight. There is likely to be a future session dedicated to the topic.</i> Paul Clifford and colleagues to progress the Northern Roots bike hub project adjustment request in consultation with the Chair of the Board and Section 151 Officer (Oldham Council's Director of Finance): <i>project adjustment request was submitted to Government on 8 November for an outcome within 20 working days. A decision is pending.</i> Jennifer Penn to consider scheduling meetings for Thursdays and Fridays to accommodate MPs and others with commitments at the start of the week: <i>next meeting provisionally scheduled for 13:00-15:00 on Friday, 8 March 2024 (likely to be the AGM).</i>
7	Procedural business and any items accepted as urgent business (William Lees-Jones) Towns Fund monitoring and evaluation return for April-September 2023 The monitoring and evaluation return shared with the Board on 30 November describes financial and delivery progress with the Towns Fund projects in Q1-2 of 2023/24. It has been drafted by project managers with colleagues in Finance providing spend oversight. The Board made no comments and approved the return for submission to Government. ACTION: Oldham Council to submit the Towns Fund monitoring return for Q1-2 of 2023/24 on behalf of the Board, carrying the signatures of the Chair of the Board and the Section 151 Officer (Oldham Council's new Director of Finance, Sarah Johnston).
8	Town centre update – regeneration <i>Speakers' presentation slides will be shared with Board members after the meeting.</i> General progress (Paul Clifford) The Council and Muse are making good progress towards a strategic planning framework and a business plan for the sequencing of town centre housing developments. Linked to this, the Council has secured £3m from the One Public Estate Brownfield Land Release Fund to help with remediation works on three sites. The low carbon town centre heat network feasibility has been funded to RIBA Stage 2 design by the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero (DESNZ), the Council and First Choice Homes Oldham. A bid has been submitted to the Green Heat Network Fund for £1m in revenue grant to take the design to RIBA Stage 3, and another £7.7m capital grant to help make the heat network project attractive to the private sector with a 10% IRR. The outcome of the bid is expected before Christmas. Procurement of the delivery partner will be funded via the DESNZ Local Net Zero Accelerator programme via the Greater Manchester Combined Authority, after the Greater Manchester

	consortium bid to the Innovate UK Net Zero Living Pathfinder Places programme (which included Oldham and Manchester) was unsuccessful. • High Street Accelerator Pilot Fund (Maria Cotton) The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities has launched the High Street Accelerator Pilot. Oldham and nine other towns will each receive £237k revenue and access to a shared pot worth £5m (full details to follow at a launch on 6 December). The Oldham pilot will have a dual focus: improving the evening and night-time economy (including gaining Purple Flag accreditation), and managing voids, primarily on Union Street and Yorkshire Street. It is hoped that the pilot will address some of the challenges faced by retailers including shoplifting, anti-social behaviour, and unauthorised use of land by travellers. There will be temporary appointments to help deliver an independent audit of the town centre from January to March, and an assessment of property leases to determine property owner details and unit vacancies and voids. The audit specialists will walk the town centre during the day and at night to record their perceptions of safety, cleanliness, accessibility and more. The assessment of the town centre could result in an empty shops strategy and/or action plan to encourage new lettings through practical steps such as a digital estate agency offering wraparound business support, innovative advertising hoardings on vacant units, and the reshaping of shop interiors to allow for shared uses. The pilot should complement the draft Local Plan, which includes guidance requiring a particular standard/style of shopfronts to build on work first begun during the leadership of MP Jim McMahon. When Kelly Webb enquired about consultation with businesses, Kashif Ashraf described quarterly events with Frank Rothwell that typically attract 100 businesses. The Leader also described “Meet the Leader” events in the town and district centres. The Vice-Chair and Kashif Ashraf commented that Oldham would benefit from a greater variety of independent retailers and that the pilot could potentially help businesses to find premises suited to their needs, whether in the town centre or elsewhere. Board members acknowledged that the national, mayoral, and local elections in 2024 could mean major changes for Oldham. • Government’s Long-Term Plan for Towns (Chadderton) (Paul Clifford) Chadderton has been chosen for a 10-year endowment worth £20m announced in September as part of a new levelling up fund. The selection criterion was based on a most deprived built-up area assessment, looking at populations of between 20,000 and 100,000. The geographical extent covers Chadderton North, Chadderton South, and Chadderton Central, plus small parts of Coldhurst, Werneth, and Failsworth West. Chadderton will need a board to develop a town plan. Details are still emerging, but the board will be comparable to the Oldham Town Centre Board. Subject to further details being announced, the board could build on partnerships like The New Chadderton Partnership and dovetail its own plan with the West District Plan. ACTION: Paul Clifford to provide an update on Chadderton at the next meeting.
9	Town centre update – general <i>Speakers’ presentation slides will be shared with Board members after the meeting.</i>

- **Events including evaluation of recent activity (Rachel Wood)**

The Council has delivered an inclusive and accessible events programme during 2023 using internal and external resources e.g. the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sports grant used to screen the Coronation of King Charles III in Oldham town centre. There has been a strong focus on involving businesses to generate the best possible return on investment. Social media, digital adverts and physical flyers have been used to generate widespread interest in the events programme. At recent events, new physical discount flyers were redeemed more often than the digital equivalents. Local businesses also proved easier to engage about promotions and late-night openings than national retailers. Options for businesses to sponsor events and run more promotions are being explored for 2024.

ACTION: Rachel Wood to contact Kashif Ashraf to discuss events and promotions.

- **Unit occupancy and footfall levels and targets (Maria Cotton)**

Vacancy rates in Oldham based exclusively on Spindles data are 21.62% compared to the North of England (16.5%) and UK (11%). The town centre audit in 2024 will reveal the robustness of the town centre and prompt work to tackle the main issues. The Council will explore new ways of monitoring town centre usage, such as virtual perimeters for a real-world area known as geofences that can be introduced and moved quickly and used to drawdown data recorded since 2019. Although the technology has limitations, such as being unable to confirm who is using different storeys and units within large buildings, it can reveal patterns of town centre use, arrival points, visitor destinations, and more.

The Chair commented that the evening and night-time economy is important to the town centre and encouraged the Council to focus on what can and cannot be influenced, starting with meaningful data capture and analysis to reveal churn, and positive communications to counter negative news stories about alcohol-related matters. He encouraged work with responsible licensees and operators and noted that licensed cafes can operate across both the daytime and night-time economies.

- **Communications (Jessica Beckett)**

The Council uses different social media and online platforms to promote progress with the Towns Fund projects e.g. the Leader's blog and forthcoming piece about the steel frame for the new market. Messages are always tailored to suit the audience/platform.

Major stories from recent months include the opening of Hilton Square and the introduction of bollards to manage traffic flow on the high street.

There has been a successful campaign and blog to highlight the social value of Creating a Better Place, including local jobs for local people. Muse, Oldham College, and the Council have run a social media campaign about construction work experience opportunities, including placements with Muse.

There was a recent campaign to promote Small Business Saturday, complementing the Leader's visits to businesses. Retailers in the town centre and district centres described

	their services and products in 42 posts that generated 133,00 impressions (people stopping to look/read) and 15,000 engagements (likes, comments and shares). Kashif Ashraf encouraged the Council to include trader stories, quotes, and videos on Twitter and TikTok, and asked Board members to promote good news through LinkedIn.
10	Substantive business – Towns Fund <i>Speakers asked Board members to refer to the project summary document that was circulated by email before the meeting.</i> visi 1) Relocating Tommyfield Market (Maria Cotton / Paul Clifford) With approximately 18 months until the move, traders are working towards the end of January to apply for a stall in the new market. The application form has been shared with the Chair and Vice-Chair and is available upon request. Staff in the Markets Service will score certain parts of the applications. Traders whose applications receive the highest marks will be the first to choose their preferred stall locations (from mid-March). Then, from April onwards, traders will need to develop business plans as the final gateway stage prior to signing leases. If any stalls are still available come July, they will be marketed. Food and beverage businesses will be located together on the lower ground floor. Traders with similar energy/space requirements will be grouped together e.g. sellers of chilled or frozen produce. The site has been remediated following the demolition of TJ Hughes. Piling works are ongoing and the project should conclude in December 2024, ready for traders to move in during Q1 of 2025. 2) Flexible workspace (Paul Clifford) The office space will be completed by January, enabling Council staff and colleagues from Greater Manchester Police, MioCare and Transport for Greater Manchester to move in from January-March. The social enterprise space known as The Hive will be completed by January for a launch in February. 3) Northern Roots (Anna da Silva) The charity has a dedicated fundraising arm and is delivering growing, educational, volunteering, arts, social prescribing, and landscape management projects while working closely with the Council on the capital build process. A pre-construction services agreement for the visitor centre commenced in September. The current design is subject to revisions because surveys have revealed mineshafts and badger activity, but the final building will include a café, production kitchen, classrooms, prayer room, office and more. It could well achieve the Passivhaus standard for sustainability. Four of Get Oldham Working's employability and wellbeing programmes will be delivered on site from January. Phase 1 of Northern Roots is focused on a performance space in the woods, amphitheatre, visitor centre, forestry hub (back of house and staff training), and children's play area. Phase 2 of the urban farm is in the planning phase.

	The project is supporting volunteers from Positive Steps and attracting media attention from the likes of BBC World Service. Community champions are exploring the site's heritage through a project named, "Beautiful Oldham – why not?", linked to the "Beautiful Oldham Society" founded by Mary Higgs in the 1920s. 4) Flexible performance space (Paul Clifford) Planning determination is currently scheduled for 20 December. RIBA Stage 4 design work is commencing, and a procurement strategy is being developed for a construction work partner.
11	Action review / next steps (William Lees-Jones) See individual actions within main body of minutes.
12	Any other business (William Lees-Jones) None
13	Time and date of next meeting(s) (William Lees-Jones) Provisionally 13:00-15:00 on Friday, 8th March in the Crompton Suite, Civic Centre The meeting closed at 14:55.