

Minutes

MEETING: Oldham Town Centre Board

DATE: 14 March 2025

VENUE: Training Room 3, Spindles, Oldham

TIME: 12:30

PRESENT	Ashraf, Kashif	President of Oldham Chamber of Commerce, Greater Manchester Chamber
	Bennett, Katie	Manager, Spindles Town Square Shopping Centre
	Cotton, Maria	Assistant Director for Strategic Property, Investment and Place Making, Oldham Council
	Da Silva, Anna	Chief Executive Officer, Northern Roots
	Gifford, Mark	Chief Executive Officer, First Choice Homes Oldham
	Green, Kirsty	Development Officer, Oldham Council
	Harban, Rachel	Town Centre and Markets Business Manager, Oldham Council (Minutes)
	Holgate, Sam	Founder and Director, Filigree Communications (Guest via MS Teams)
	Hughes, David	Director of Economy, Oldham Council
	Hughes, Maggie	Owner, Zutti Fashion (Vice-Chair)
	Kipling, Shelley	Chief Executive, Oldham Council
	Lees-Jones, William	Managing Director, JW Lees & Co. (Chair)
	Lewis, Christopher	Assistant Director for Creating a Better Place, Oldham Council
	Mills, Peter	Co-founder, Brand Ethos (Guest via MS Teams)
	Roberts, Nick	Head of Services and Commercial Development, Transport for Greater Manchester (Guest)
	Rothwell, Frank	Chairman and Owner, Oldham Athletic F.C.
	Shah, Councillor Arooj	Leader and Cabinet Member for Building a Better Oldham, Oldham Council
	Taylor, Ian	Director, Bakersson Limited (Guest)
	Vogel, Alex	Senior Development Manager, Muse
	Wharton, Jake	Communications Officer, Oldham Council
	Windsor-Welsh, Laura	Oldham Director, Action Together
	Wood, Rachel	Cultural Partnerships Manager, Oldham Council
APOLOGIES	Abrahams, MP Debbie	Oldham East and Saddleworth Constituency
	Ali, Councillor Mohon	Cabinet Member for Education and Skills, Oldham Council
	Barton, Emma	Deputy Chief Executive (Place), Oldham Council
	Brown, Richard	Relationship Manager, Arts Council England
	Hussain, Councillor Fida	Cabinet Member for Enterprise,

		Oldham Council
	Jordan, Simon	Principal and Chief Executive, Oldham College
	Lawson, Jayne	Executive Director of Customer Experience, First Choice Homes Oldham
	Lewis, Chris	Senior Youth Work Manager, Oldham Council
	Lightfoot, Andrew	Deputy Chief Executive, Greater Manchester Combined Authority
	Lockwood, Stuart	Chief Executive, Oldham Community Leisure
	McMahon, MP Jim	Oldham West, Chadderton and Royton Constituency
	Patterson, John	Chief Clinical Officer, NHS Oldham CCG
	Penn, Jennifer	Town Centre Business Manager, Oldham Council
	Rahim, Fazal	Project Coordinator, Oldham Interfaith Forum
	Riley, Michelle	Owner, Fox and Pine / Cob and Coal Tap
	Taylor, Steve	Chief Officer, Northern Care Alliance (Royal Oldham Hospital)
	Yousaf, Adnan	Real Estate Manager, The Cross Group

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. Governance

Appointment of Chair and Vice-Chair

Kashif Ashraf nominated William Lees-Jones for Chair and Maggie Hughes for Vice-Chair. Both nominations were put to a full vote and accepted unanimously; the Board reinstated William Lees-Jones and Maggie Hughes for 12 months.

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

None.

5. Declarations of Interests (William Lees-Jones)

Previous declarations were noted. No new declarations were received.

6. Minutes of previous meeting (William Lees-Jones)

The minutes dated 10 January 2025 were agreed as a true record and approved for publication online at oldham.gov.uk (proposed by the Chair and seconded by the Vice-Chair).

7. Review of actions from the previous meeting (William Lees-Jones)

Three actions were carried forward from the January meeting:

ACTION: Maria Cotton / Jennifer Penn to work with the Chair and Vice-Chair to review Board membership, in part to ensure sufficient private sector representation.

ACTION: Jennifer Penn to publish Board member profiles online, following the review of membership.

ACTION: Oldham Council to invite Oldham Coliseum Theatre onto the Board from the date of the next meeting (TBC for June).

8. Procedural business and any items accepted as urgent business (William Lees-Jones / David Hughes)

No items were tabled as urgent business.

Review of Terms of Reference

The Terms of Reference must be reviewed annually and will be circulated after this meeting.

Review of Board membership

See item 7 above.

9. Town Centre Update

Bee Network (Nick Roberts, Transport for Greater Manchester (TfGM))

TfGM is committed to the operational improvements, network growth, and strategic network reviews that are essential to build a fully integrated transport network. The Mayor of Greater Manchester has already commissioned a review of gaps in the Bee Network, with passengers able to comment at www.beenetwork.com/network-reviews. The gap analysis does not have a fixed end date and service improvements can be progressed at any time. It should be noted, however, that strategic route reviews require consultation and can last for up to 12 months.

One of the major challenges is extending the Bee Network into areas which operators have overlooked previously for commercial reasons.

Board members offered to support community engagement and consultation, for example by co-designing activities (Laura Windsor-Welsh), mapping out the potential demand for extra services before the Northern Roots visitor centre opens (Anna da Silva), and promoting the network review on the Town Centre Living Development Framework website (Alex Vogel).

Councillor Shah commented that some individuals and communities feel disconnected and unsure who is accountable for the reliability of services and choice of routes. Further work is required to engage with current and potential passengers e.g. those who cannot access existing routes, those who travel between the different boroughs of Greater Manchester, and those who would benefit from night buses.

Passenger numbers have grown since the launch of the Bee Network and this trend should continue as people take advantage of the new “tap and go” system that provides contactless and ticketless options for daily and weekly travel. Passengers should use the same bank card or mobile phone payment mechanism to benefit from automatic daily caps (£9.50 peak/£7.80 off-peak). Ambassadors have been positioned at Oldham stations to support the launch, and special passes include annual passes and passes for older people.

ACTION: Maria Cotton to follow up with Nick Roberts about overnight car parking at Mumps.

ACTION: Maria Cotton to follow up with Nick Roberts about people taking bikes on trams.

ACTION: Maria Cotton to coordinate a Board response to the Bee Network route review.

ACTION: Alex Vogel to add Bee Network updates to the Oldham Town Centre Living Development Framework website.

Oldham Town Centre Living Development Framework (Alex Vogel, Muse)

The consultation last summer revealed key priorities for current and potential residents, such as parking, safety and accessibility, and access to local services such as GPs. Some sessions were held inside Spindles to showcase the wider transformation of the town centre. Upturn Enterprise helped Muse to reach a wider audience and brought a bit of fun to the consultation, whilst Turley coordinated the entire process and managed communications. Feedback from young people was mixed, with some citing infrequent and unreliable public transport and limited employment opportunities as deterrents to living in Oldham in adulthood.

After the Framework was endorsed in November, Muse held a public consultation on six proposals: Prince’s Gate, Civic Centre, Civic Centre Tower, former Magistrates’ Court, former Manchester Chambers, and former leisure centre. Every piece of feedback received from 24 February-7 March was logged and checked for possible actions. Future consultations on planning applications will be hosted at: www.oldhamtownliving.co.uk. Muse and the Council will work closely to plan communications and prevent consultation fatigue amongst residents.

Tenures are being reviewed to confirm freehold/leasehold arrangements. Some specifics are known already e.g. the Civic Centre will be an accessible thoroughfare rather than a gated community.

The Council is working with Muse and partners to ensure sufficient parking across the town centre for businesses, residents and visitors, through a new parking strategy. It was noted that developments will typically have parking spaces for disabled residents only, as part of efforts to reduce emissions, improve air quality, and promote healthy lifestyles.

Anna da Silva offered support for future consultations, commenting that Northern Roots has a team of local people trained in research and delivery of consultation and space co-design.

ACTION: Alex Vogel to share the Town Centre Living consultation results with the Board.

ACTION: Maria Cotton to bring the details of the new outdoor market to the next meeting.

ACTION: Alex Vogel to bring another update on the Town Centre Living Development Framework to a future meeting.

Town Centre Branding (Sam Holgate, Filigree Communications/Peter Mills, Brand Ethos)

Filigree and Brand Ethos have been collaborating with Oldham Council on a new narrative and identity for the town centre and soon-to-open spaces. Board members received a confidential preview of the branding and were asked not to discuss or share details outside of the meeting.

Town Centre Activity and Updates

Illuminate Light Night (Rachel Wood, Oldham Council)

Members watched a video about Illuminate on 22 February, when 450 people from Oldham and Greater Manchester walked in a light parade, Oldham Theatre Workshop performed their “Harmony Hall” projection show, and hundreds of people created and visited light artworks. The event was promoted widely and received positive feedback from visitors/participants. Activities at Northern Roots on 23 February were cancelled due to poor weather.

High Street Accelerator (Maggie Hughes, High Street Accelerator Partnership)

Current projects include street art, cleansing and greening, plus heritage trails.

Communications (Jake Wharton, Oldham Council)

Recent news stories include:

- Evening and night-time economy successes: Bank Top Tavern being named “Most Atmospheric Live Music Venue in Greater Manchester” (SME Northern Enterprise Awards), and the Fox and Pine receiving the top CAMRA branch accolade for the fourth year as voted by local branch members.
- £20m investment in Oldham from the Government’s Community Regeneration Fund.
- Public consultation on six sites under Oldham Town Living Development Framework.
- Forthcoming exhibitions at Gallery Oldham.
- Bid by Pro Excel events, founded by Oldham-born Liam O’Reilly, to break the Guinness World Record for the most dancers to ever perform with a singer.

10. Substantive business – Towns Fund

Northern Roots capital build (Christopher Lewis, Oldham Council)

Oldham Council has named Willmott Dixon as the main contractor for the capital build, which has a target completion date of spring/summer 2026. Site hoardings will show the ambitions for the site and residents will receive courtesy letters before works commence.

Northern Roots Charity (Anna da Silva, Northern Roots)

There was a presentation about the ambitions for Northern Roots to transform neglected land, connect communities and create opportunities for all to grow. The project is attracting interest nationally and has a deliberately broad and ambitious portfolio to ensure mass appeal.

The Charity is described as financially self-funding because it has secured £3m in grants from funders who are a) not the local authority, and b) unable to fund local authorities. Commercial income and commissions are important because most funding is short-term. There is a long-term ambition for the Charity to become commercially self-sustaining.

The Charity is seeking a marketing consultant to lead a re-branding exercise. Councillor Shah commented that Northern Roots should be promoted as a shared endeavour between the

Charity and Oldham Council (landowner and facilitator/funder of capital works), backed by strategic partners including this Board and Oldham Community Leisure.

Flexible Performance Space (Maria Cotton, Oldham Council)

Tilbury Douglas and their sub-contractors have now completed the soft strip-out and surveys. The refurbished Coliseum will be the heart of a Cultural Quarter involving a cultural cooperative model in the area around Fairbottom Street and Yorkshire Street.

ACTION: Oldham Council/Tilbury Douglas to cover the Coliseum refurb at the next meeting.

Tommyfield Market (Maria Cotton, Oldham Council)

With the shell construction complete, the final stages of work are taking place on the inside of the new space e.g. stall construction and stallholder fitout.

All traders have produced business plans and are being supported to develop marketing plans. From April, the Council will issue leases and reveal which traders have secured certain stalls.

There was a positive meeting between the traders and the Leader in February, when the Leader committed to a hybrid model for rents and confirmed that £2m of the £20m from the Community Regeneration Fund would be allocated to a grant scheme to enable some traders to purchase modern, low-carbon, fit-for-purpose kit, and help larger traders to move into vacant units in Spindles and the town centre.

Nearly all traders who applied for a stall in the new space were successful. Those who cannot move into Spindles (e.g. because there is no gas supply) will be helped to find other premises.

Stakeholder visits coordinated by Action Together are helping to inform accessibility features.

Councillor Shah thanked the Board for sharing the message that the Council supports businesses and reminded delegates of the opportunity to tour the new market hall from 15:30.

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

See individual actions within the main body of the minutes.

12. Any other business (William Lees-Jones)

ACTION: Maria Cotton to provide an update on the new events space and closure of the Queen Elizabeth Hall at the next meeting.

ACTION: Maria Cotton to confirm the market hall target opening date during the next meeting.

13. Time and date of next meeting (William Lees-Jones)

TBC (meetings to be scheduled for June, September, December/January, and March).