

NOTES

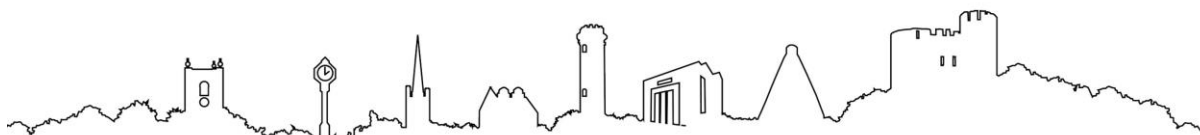
Meeting title	Brierley Hill Town Board
Date & time	Friday 14 th February 2025 at 10 am
Venue	MS Teams
Invitees	<p>Tim Sunter – Chair Cat Eccles MP Claire Millard – Dudley College Clare Waldron – Dudley MBC Clive Skidmore – Property Owner Councillor Adam Davies Councillor Matthew Cook Councillor Wayne Little Councillor Karen Westwood Councillor Steve Edwards Emma Atkins – Dudley MBC Frank Chamberlain - Project Manager Brierley Hill Community Programme Hannah Cashmore – Gov office, Business and Trade UK Helen Martin – Dudley MBC James Challis – Dudley CVS Jayne Pilkington – Dudley MBC Jonathan Poole – Savills Mark Clarke - Dudley MBC Neil Thomas – Dudley College Nicky Haigh – Transport for the West Midlands Paul Hunt – Higgs LLP Rocco De Gregorio – GLL Sandeep Shingadia – Transport for the West Midlands Shane Birch-Bastock – Business Owner/Brierley Hill Traders Steven Bridgewater – Brierley Hill Market</p>

1. Declarations of interest not already declared

None.

2. Apologies

Cllr K Westwood, Cllr S Edwards, S Bridgewater, C Eccles MP, E Atkins, H Cashmore, N Haigh, H Martin, J Poole and N Thomas.



Liam Brooker, Transport for the West Midlands, attended the Board meeting in place of Nicky Haigh.

C Millard (newly appointed Vice Principal at Dudley College) was welcomed to the meeting in place of N Thomas. R Benton, Resonance, resigned from the Board. The Board wished to record their thanks for the advice and support provided by N Thomas and R Benton and wished them well for the future.

3. Minutes of the previous meeting

The Minutes of the previous meeting were approved as an accurate record.

4. Any matters arising not otherwise on the Agenda

C Eccles MP had written to the Board raising the following matters:-

Concern regarding the future of the Red House Glass Cone and the security of staff jobs; this remained a concern until the Council had confirmed its 2025/26 budget.

With the Tourism week approaching there was lots to celebrate locally and the MP requested this be investigated. **Action TS to find out when this is taking place.**

Changing Places Toilet Project – Following the cancellation of the project the MP is exploring alternative funding streams. The help was gratefully acknowledged by the Board.

Midland Metro Extension – The MP was exploring with Richard Parker, West Midlands Mayor, bringing the Metro to High Street and, in addition, the option of extending Pre Metro Operations along the Stourbridge Junction freight line.

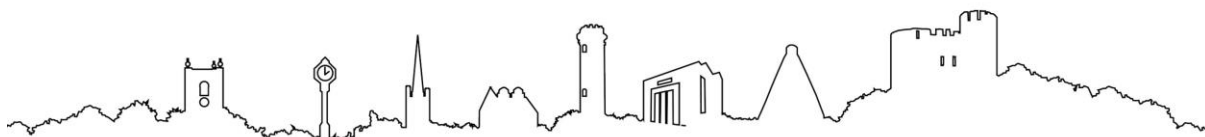
Public Realm Projects in Brierley Hill – The MP was making a case to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) for additional funding to complete the public realm projects.

Volunteers for St Michael's Church were required for gardening and general tidying in the graveyard. **Action TS to seek volunteers.**

T Sunter, on behalf of the Board, wished to thank the MP for her support with the above mentioned issues. **Action T Sunter** to take up the MP's offer of a meeting to discuss these issues further.

5. Metro Update including link to the High Street

L Brooker confirmed that work was progressing on phase 1 with the bulk of heavy civils having completed and early works were continuing on phase 2 including a review of utilities works and vegetation clearance.



Work with key partners (Dudley Council and Merry Hill) on plans were progressing. The forecast opening to Merry Hill was in 2028. Support from Central Government for the project had been strong. The extension to Brierley Hill was currently not part of the funding package and was yet to be agreed. There was to be a meeting with Dudley MBC and the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) Board concerning this matter.

T Sunter confirmed the Board's interest focussed on completing the Metro link to the Brierley Hill High Street and queried how strong the willpower was to get this approved and what evidence there was that this would happen. L Brooker said the challenge with this was that Government investment could only come forward if it was demonstrated that it would unlock growth and development and so there was the need to work with colleagues from Dudley MBC and WMCA on this aspect. A large amount of data had already been collected and it was now a matter of how this data was presented.

T Sunter queried if the bridging over the canal (part of the Levelling Up Fund grant) as opposed to waiting for the completion of Metro to the High Street was still an option. If this foot link was delayed by lack of a timeline on Metro the risk was that the funding for it would be lost too. S Shingadia confirmed that there was the desire to improve connectivity and work was being undertaken in the wider corridor so it was important to ensure all wider regeneration opportunities were being developed.

The meeting discussed ownership of the project and T Sunter expressed concern that there was no set timescale and that no one was driving the business plan.

Action MC/SS to discuss the position concerning who would take the lead on this matter outside the meeting and report back to the Board.

It was encouraging to note that the WM Mayor had given his commitment for the link to the Brierley Hill High Street. **Action Cllr AD** to request the Leader made contact with the WM Mayor to reinforce this commitment.

L Brooker was asked for the estimated cost of the final phase - **Action LB** to investigate and confirm back to the Board.

A query was raised from Cllr A Davies regarding the 12 month key timeline and the progress that could be expected between now and November 2025. **Action LB/MC** to meet to review timelines and consider how this could be taken forward.

6. Future use of former Civic Centre

The meeting discussed the future use of the former Civic Centre. The police were due to vacate this landmark building which it was considered would be difficult to convert and relet. If the building was sold the risk was that it would be left to deteriorate and, as it was attached to the Civic Centre, this would adversely affect the centre.



The building was not considered suitable for housing as the centre occasionally held loud music and other events that had a late finish. The meeting considered the possible uses for the building which included volunteer activities, a restaurant, or letting to a third party a part of the building (thus sharing the risk with other users). The next steps were to find out a timeline from the police and what possible uses there could be. J Challis said there was a need to proactively work on this as, whatever happened with the building would have a significant impact on the Civic Centre. There was also the need to be mindful of how much it would cost to refurbish the building.

As this was a commercial building there were considerable restrictions on what could be done. The meeting agreed to make contact with the senior police commissioner for a detailed development brief looking at the constraints and opportunities in order for potential partners for development to be found. As the building was in a conservation area this would make it more eligible for funding, although it would require positive engagement by the current building owner.

T Sunter said there needed to be someone taking the lead on this matter so that it could be driven forward. As a first step it was agreed that ownership of the building should be established. Security was an issue when the police vacated and this was a matter to be discussed with the police. Cllr A Davies felt it was important to keep a police presence in a section of the building with possibly police cars to be parked outside and, if possible, the blue lamp to remain on the side of the building for safety. It was known that the police were actively looking to stay in a smaller office in the Brierley Hill area so this could contribute towards a possible solution. **Action TS** to investigate this matter with the police.

There was a suggestion to do a virtual tour and upload it onto the website to show its current state. Cllr W Little asked for the building to be opened up during heritage week to allow the community to view it and create an interest. J Pilkington said the police had been helpful when they vacated Dudley police station and had provided access for a virtual tour so theoretically the same could be done for the Civic Centre.

7. Levelling Up Fund (LUF)

The Council submitted a monitoring return in December 2024 setting out the changes to the programme and providing updated project costs. MHCLG had now issued a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to Dudley. A Cabinet report had been prepared which sought approval to accept the LUF award and enter the MoU. The report was awaiting S151 Council officer approval before submission to Cabinet.



MHCLG had released £30k of revenue funding for the Brierley Hill LUF project. Mitigations to reduce the risk to the Council of any cost over-runs were currently being investigated including back-to-back delivery opportunities with the partners and claw back. F Chamberlain asked if the aspiration for the inclusion of a shop in the High Street to showcase the opportunities at the college was still an option.
Action MC to investigate and provide an update.

8. Future High Streets

M Clarke confirmed the programme, which had been in implementation since 2021, was now substantially complete. Contracts needed to be let by the end of March 2025. The headroom figure (£180k) was still to be confirmed and it was important not to go over budget. A dialogue with WMCA was to be opened regarding the devo deal/placemaking agenda.

Public Realm Improvements:-

Dudley Road – Hard and soft landscaping works were now substantially complete. Tactile paving was to be installed by the end of February to make it safer for pedestrians and improve the appearance. Snagging issues were currently being addressed. There remained problems with inappropriate parking on pavements which was being reviewed by the parking team. Vegetation clearing works to the roundabout and splitter island and tree maintenance works were scheduled for the end of February. The option of installing spotlights to the lighting columns to highlight the Round Oak Memorial (due to be unveiled on 5th March) was under review.

Link Space - Snagging works on the linked space were currently in progress. Combat Archery was still to be completed. Completion of the lease was being progressed with WMCA in accordance with the funding agreement. The interpretation panel was still to be finalised.

High Street – J Pilkington thanked the Ward Councillors for highlighting the snagging issues which were now being progressed. Within the graveyard everything that did not require a faculty had been completed but the hard landscaping around the font which did require a faculty remained outstanding. Archaeological excavation in Marsh Park was being championed by F Chamberlain.

Heritage Buildings Programme – Phase 2 of the market was due to commence at the end of March/beginning of April to address the flat roof over the shopfronts which had been leaking onto the new shopfronts.

Work had completed and the scaffolding removed from the Three Crowns Pub with opening to the public expected in mid-March.



Repair of the clock at 151 – 152 High Street had been completed and the clock now reinstated.

A query was raised concerning the future of the Cottage Street car park once the contractors had completed their works. J Pilkington confirmed this decision was to be reviewed by Corporate Landlord Services.

S Birch-Bastock asked whether there was a Council policy in place to ensure that when contractors left a site there was a requirement for them to reinstate the paving immediately upon completion of their works? J Pilkington confirmed the expectation to reinstate immediately was stated within Council policy.

Miles Court - Cllr W Little said that a number of reports had been received concerning a tree that had lifted the paving up and was causing an obstruction particularly for mobility scooters. **Action JP** to raise this matter with the Council's tree officer.

Plaster on the back wall of the Market - Cllr W Little queried if any repairs could be undertaken? J Pilkington confirmed the Council was aware of the issue and was currently reviewing possible options with the owners.

Cllr A Davies asked about replanting on the corner of Little Cottage Street and whether there was any funding available. J Pilkington confirmed this was on the wish list, but that this also required maintenance by the Green Care team.

Action Cllr AD to forward details of the relaying of a footway around a tree to J Pilkington for investigation.

It was agreed that these improvements be detailed in the Brierley Hill newsletter to raise awareness of initiatives being undertaken, however this was to be drafted carefully as there was limited funding available and it should not provide an opportunity for people to put forward other projects.

9. Visitor Data Sub-Working Group

T Sunter believed there was benefit to reinstating the Working Group that had previously reviewed visitor statistics/data – those to be involved in the Working Group included M Clarke, T Sunter and Jacki Lakin. **Action TS to arrange**

10. Terms of Reference Review

P Hunt was thanked for his assistance in updating the Terms of Reference. Board membership was agreed subject to the removal of Evolve Estates (who had now left the Borough). Membership was set to run for two years before re-election, with the next review due in March 2027.



Following the suggestion that a representative from Nine Locks Community Centre be invited to join the Board, T Sunter agreed to consider the merits of this further. M Clarke asked if Maritime Capital (the new owners of the Moor Centre) should be invited to attend Board meetings. T Sunter/Cllrs A Davies and W Little were to meet representatives from Maritime Capital on 26th March and would raise the subject with them at the meeting. J Poole from Savills, was to be asked to arrange for a representative to attend the Board meetings on his behalf if he was unable to attend.

11. Community Activities Update

- a. **Newsletter** – C Skidmore was arranging the printing and distribution of the newsletter.
- b. **Cultural Consortium Co-ordinator** – Although officially the position ended on 31st March 2025, the intention was to extend the role.
- c. **Informal meeting with traders** concerning the marketing and branding of the town, with the need to speak to other stakeholders about this matter.
- d. **Sustainable Communities Fund** – F Chamberlain continued to work with archaeology and was actively looking for additional volunteers to participate at the park. Work was being undertaken with the local pubs. A detectorist event was to be held. A report had been completed and a talk was to be given in March about archaeology. WW2 posters were to be put in the libraries to create an archive and collate stories.
- e. **Commonwealth Games Legacy Fund** – To be completed by the end of March in line with funding. The event by the canal had been successful and the WMCA evaluation team had selected this project as an example of the good work being undertaken.
- f. **Forthcoming Events** – The following events were planned:-

During July there was to be a Disney themed event.

St Michaels Open Day was on 31st May - **Action TS** to send CS the contact details at St Michaels Church.

August D-Day Darlings to perform at St Michaels on 80th Anniversary of VJ day, 15th August (tickets cost £16).

Early Day Bloom Day – to be held late May/early June.

Planting out day with the college.



Heritage Open Day – main day 20th September – but could be spread over a few days/weeks; this had worked well (by chance) last year and so may be repeated.

Christmas lights switch on 21st November – it was agreed there needed to a back-up plan in case of inclement weather.

Remembrance Sunday - 9th November, Remembrance Day on 11th November.

It was noted that the programmed series of events did increase footfall in the area.

12. Any Other Urgent Business

Volunteers for St Michaels Churchyard – T Sunter confirmed there were currently two core volunteers plus students from the Glass House College who worked hard to ensure the graveyard was kept tidy. **Action TS** to respond to the email from C Eccles MP (as detailed in section 4) concerning this matter.

13. Date of Next Meeting – Friday 2nd May 2025 at 10 am via MS Teams.

