



EXECUTIVE BOARD DECISION

REPORT OF: Executive Member for Growth and Development

LEAD OFFICERS: Director of Growth and Development

DATE: 9 January 2020

PORTFOLIO/S AFFECTED: Growth and Development

WARD/S AFFECTED: Darwen East /Darwen South/Darwen West/West Pennine

KEY DECISION: YES NO

SUBJECT: Darwen Town Fund Update

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is provide an update on preparations regarding Government's invitation to the Council to develop and submit a Towns Fund Investment Plan to help secure a Town Deal for Darwen.

Darwen is one of 101 places in England invited by Government to prepare an Investment Plan for submission by Summer 2020, as part of the new national Towns Fund programme. Government has published initial guidance, with further and more detailed advice expected in early 2020 on funding eligibility, capital/revenue mix, programme timescales and wider business-case requirements.

This report sets out the Council's proposed approach to forming a Darwen Deal Board, as required by Government, and in developing a robust Darwen Investment Plan, including engagement activities with residents and businesses.

The report also references the need for Government to extend the geographical area in scope, as the proposed Towns Fund boundary for Darwen fails to recognise key opportunities, connections and communities relevant to developing a comprehensive place-focused Investment Plan.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Executive Board:

1. Notes the contents of this report;
2. Agree the proposed membership of the Council's advisory Darwen Deal Board, as outlined in section 2 of this report;
3. Authorise the Chief Executive and Director of HR, Legal and Governance, in conjunction with the Executive Member for Growth and Development, to finalise and publish by 31 January 2020 the governance arrangements and terms of reference of the Council's advisory Darwen Deal Board, as outlined in section 2 of this report;
4. Though noting the proposed Towns Fund boundary for Darwen, request the Chief Executive and Director of Growth and Development to engage with Government to extend the proposed

geographical scope to include linked opportunities and established connections within and between Lower Darwen, Huddlesden and Edgworth; and

5. Request the Director of Growth and Development and Chair of the Darwen Deal Board to present the draft Darwen Investment Plan, for consideration and approval at a future meeting of the Executive Board, and to provide progress updates as required.

3. BACKGROUND

1. Context

In early November 2019, the Towns Fund Prospectus identified an initial wave of 101 places invited by Government to develop proposals for a Town Deal, as part of the £3.6bn Towns Fund. Darwen is included in the first wave, though it is not clear how Government identified the initial 101 places. We await further information regarding the inclusion of Blackburn in the next wave of Town Deals.

Government guidance requires the Darwen Town Deal to be directed and supported by the Council, with an advisory Darwen Deal Board, which is private sector led, supporting the Council on the development of a Darwen Investment Plan. Both the Council and the Board must agree the Investment Plan.

The Towns Fund is designed to provide the core public funding in Town Deals agreed with Government. Further Government guidance is due in early 2020, given available information is largely silent on funding eligibility criteria with programme timescales unclear as well as the capital and revenue funding mix that may be available. The current guidance is also unclear on any local match funding and resource alignment requirements and Government's expected outcome measures / targets.

The principle objective of the Government's Towns Fund is to drive the economic regeneration of towns to deliver long-term economic and productivity growth by:

- *Regeneration* - creating places where people and businesses want to live and prosper; delivering new economic and housing development opportunities; and improving economic assets, including the local cultural infrastructure.
- *Skills and Enterprise Infrastructure* – driving private sector investment, addressing skills demands and supporting SME development.
- *Connectivity* – developing local transport schemes that complement regional and national networks as well as improving digital connectivity.

Government has indicated individual Town Deals could potentially secure up to £25M in new Towns Fund support, though this will be dependent of the quality of the submitted Investment Plan and supporting business case. There may be opportunities to secure additional public funding from other Government initiatives to support the delivery of priorities within an agreed Investment Plan. Subject to further guidance, Town Deal Investment Plans need to be with Government for consideration by Summer 2020.

2. Darwen Town Deal Board

As referenced above, Government guidance requires the lead Council to have in place an advisory Town Deal Board, which is private sector led, to develop an agreed Investment Plan that will provide the framework to secure Towns Funds, as part of a Town Deal.

To this end, it is proposed the Council establishes a Darwen Deal Board to support the development of an agreed Darwen Investment Plan with prioritised, evidence-based growth and regeneration

interventions.

The Council currently benefits from the advice provided by the Darwen Town Centre Partnership. It is proposed this Partnership continues with its important work and its Chair invited to be a member of the new Darwen Deal Board to ensure the views of town centre stakeholders are fully embedded and aligned with the wider work of the Board.

Government guidance also requires representatives from local government to be members of the Town Deal Board. It is proposed the Executive Member for Growth and Development fulfils this role for the Council with membership also extended to the Chair of Darwen Town Council. Given the leadership role of the Council, the Executive Member for Growth and Development will perform the role of Vice Chair of the Darwen Deal Board.

A private sector leader must lead the Darwen Deal Board. It is proposed Wayne Wild, Managing Director of WEC Ltd, be invited to Chair the Darwen Deal Board. Wayne is a transformational business leader of a growing, high-performing engineering company that is committed to Darwen with major investment plans and a commitment to workforce development.

The proposed Board membership aims to identify public, business and community leaders with a commitment to Darwen and a record of achievement, mindful of the need to establish a Board that can work at pace and is fit for purpose. Membership composition will change over time to include new (or replacement) expertise and stakeholder representation. It is therefore proposed the Darwen Deal Board, in consultation with the Council, review whether any membership changes are needed once the Board has had the opportunity to consider its capacity and capability.

The proposed membership of the Darwen Deal Board is set out below:

Wayne Wild, Managing Director, WEC Ltd (Chair of Darwen Deal Board)
Cllr Phil Riley, Executive Member for Growth and Development, Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council (Vice Chair of Darwen Deal Board)
Cllr John East, Leader of Darwen Town Council
John Sturgess, Chair of the Darwen Town Centre Partnership
Gary Aspden, Darwen resident, global brand and design consultant, Adidas
Miranda Barker, Chief Executive of East Lancs Chamber and LEP Board Director
John Wilkinson, Regional Director, Suez Recycling and Recovery UK
Janet Pearce, Chair of Keep Darwen Tidy
Glenda Brindle, Chair of Aldridge Academy
Dr Fazal Dad, Principal, Blackburn College
Steve Waggot, Chief Executive, Blackburn Rovers

It is proposed Jake Berry MP is invited to attend meetings as an observer to the Board.

The Council would be responsible for servicing and supporting the governance and work programme of the Board. Governance and meeting arrangements would conform to local government standards with Board members observing the Nolan Principles of Public Life and committing to an agreed code of conduct.

Subject to Executive Board approval, the Chief Executive and Director of HR, Legal and Governance, in conjunction with the Executive Member for Growth and Development, will finalise and publish the governance arrangements and terms of reference of the Board by the Government's deadline of 31 January.

3. Darwen Investment Plan

Darwen has been the primary focus for major Council investment with a range of new facilities and services delivered in recent years. The Council has also invested in new public realm (including the Market Square) and infrastructure initiatives to encourage employment and housing growth in Darwen. The Council has secured significant levels of competitive growth funding from the Lancashire Enterprise Partnership, through our Darwen East Development Corridor initiative, and leveraged the investment plans of others such as Network Rail to improve the rail infrastructure linking Darwen with Greater Manchester.

The Council's growth strategy is clearly accelerating new development opportunities in Darwen and encouraging significant private investment in the area. However, we are currently developing a new Local Plan and Local Transport Plan, and with the most recent Darwen Town Centre Plan having now served its purpose, it is timely to develop and bring forward a new growth-focused Investment Plan that is consistent with Government's Towns Fund guidance.

The Darwen Deal Board will be responsible for driving this piece of work. At this stage, we envisage the Council, in conjunction with the Board, will prepare an evidence-based Investment Plan that addresses local opportunities and needs with extensive engagement with residents and businesses on shaping key priorities for action.

Building on existing and emerging growth opportunities and needs, early work will look to focus on delivering:

- *A Town Centre Renewal Investment Programme* with opportunities to re-develop Darwen Town/Market Hall, establish a Business Growth Zone to strengthen the current offer and attract new occupiers, with encouragement to create new town centre living opportunities.
- *Darwen Energy Cluster*, given opportunities to deliver major new private investment in energy production and related services in Lower Darwen and potential to deliver a local heating system for residents and businesses, which could contribute to the ambition to make Darwen one of the UK's first zero carbon towns.
- *A Greener Darwen Programme* with investment in tree planting on the moors to support key flood attenuation and drainage priorities, an improved network of public rights of way, improved local parks, opportunities to strengthen links to the Northern Forest and West Pennine Moors initiatives, with better alignment with the investment plans of the United Utilities and others.
- *A Cultural Icons and Creativity Programme* with investment in key assets and events which define and re-inforce the area's sense of pride and place to residents and visitors alike - including the Market Square, Darwen Library and Theatre, Darwen Tower, Darwen AFC, the Barlow, Turton Tower and Darwen Live, with programming to release the creative potential of the young.
- *A Connected Town and Communities Investment Programme* with opportunities to improve pedestrian movement in the town centre, deliver more EV charge points and modernised car-parking provision, with highway infrastructure improvements linking Darwen with the M65 and strategic network connections with Greater Manchester, and improved fibre broadband for a significant number of residential and business premises with weak/no connectivity.
- *A Future First Programme* focused on the area's manufacturing sector to both leverage and incentivise SME investment in innovation and skills to create the local workforce of the future now and take advantage of new market opportunities in the UK and globally. Digital skills needs will be addressed to enable businesses, schools and individuals to compete for the opportunities created by *Industry 4.0* with apprenticeship routes better aligned to economic demands and actions to lift the career ambitions of young people.

To promote the new Towns Fund, Government has created a *My Town* page on social media for members of the public to post their views. With regard to Darwen, early comments have focused on improving green spaces, more activities and arts provision for young people, and generating more economic value from the heritage of the town centre. More detailed public engagement will enable the Council and Board to better understand and test local priorities, with further Government guidance clarifying which opportunities are eligible for support from the Towns Fund.

The Darwen Investment Plan will be developed at pace, with key checkpoints, to produce an agreed Investment Plan by Summer at the very latest.

The Council will play a central role in supporting and developing the Investment Plan. The Council and Board will also deploy Government capacity funding of £160K made available to the Council to establish the Board and support the development, engagement and detailed business-case work required to produce a robust Investment Plan. The Council will be responsible for procuring specialist consultancy support as required.

The Council will also play a primary role in ensuring other key public sector partners priorities and resource planning align with the agreed Investment Plan.

We will continue to engage with the Lancashire Enterprise Partnership to ensure emerging strategic frameworks, including the Local Industrial Strategy and refreshed Strategic Economic Plan, align with the ambitions and priorities of the Darwen Investment Plan.

4. Darwen Town Deal Boundary

Government guidance proposes to use the *Built Up Area Sub Divisions* methodology developed by the Office of National Statistics (ONS) to define the area boundaries of Town Deals. The proposed boundary for Darwen is enclosed at Annex 1.

The proposed Government boundary is too tightly bound, though there is the opportunity to request a boundary change. It is proposed the Council works with Government to enlarge the proposed boundary to include Lower Darwen, Hoddlesden and Edgworth. This revised boundary will enable the Darwen Deal Board to bring forward growth, connectivity and community interventions linked with and co-dependent on the originally defined area.

The slightly enlarged geography increases the resident population in scope to 32,300, an increase of less than 5,000. Darwen would still be one of the smallest wave one Town Deal areas.

We propose the use of ONS *Lower Super Output Areas* to provide a geography that produces an area with coterminous boundaries. Without enlargement, the proposed Towns Fund boundary for Darwen would fail to recognise key opportunities, connections and communities relevant to developing a comprehensive place-focused Investment Plan. The revised proposed Town Deal boundary is enclosed at Annex 2.

4. KEY ISSUES & RISKS

Key factors such as funding eligibility criteria, programme timescales, and any match-funding requirements are unknown at this time. However, further Government guidance is expected to address outstanding information gaps. The likelihood and timeline regarding a Blackburn Town Deal are unknown at this point.

5. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The emerging proposals within this report are fully consistent with the objectives of the Council's Corporate Plan.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no direct financial implications, at this stage. Government has made a S31 payment of £160K to the Council to support the costs of developing the Darwen Deal Board and Darwen Investment Plan. A further report will be submitted to Executive Board for consideration and approval if a key Council funding decision is required.

7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

The Town Funds Prospectus (November 2019) issued by MHCLG provides guidance on developing Investment Plan proposals. The Prospectus also provides guidance on Town Deal Boards, its function, role and composition. BwD would be the "Lead Council", required to develop a Town Deal Board by the end of January 2020 and produce a Town Investment Plan by Summer 2020. BwD would also need to develop and publish the governance and decision-making structures for the Town Deal Board, in accordance with guidance provided in the Prospectus. As the Lead Council, BwD is also likely to be the accountable body in respect of any Government funding received and therefore be required to ensure compliance with any conditions.

8. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

There are no direct resource implications, at this stage. Further Government guidance should clarify any match-funding and service alignment requirements. A further report will be submitted to Executive Board for consideration and approval if a key resourcing decision is required.

9. EQUALITY AND HEALTH IMPLICATIONS

Please select one of the options below. Where appropriate please include the hyperlink to the EIA.

Option 1 Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) not required – the EIA checklist has been completed.

Option 2 In determining this matter the Executive Member needs to consider the EIA associated with this item in advance of making the decision. (*insert EIA link here*)

Option 3 In determining this matter the Executive Board Members need to consider the EIA associated with this item in advance of making the decision. (*insert EIA attachment*)

10. CONSULTATIONS

N / A

11. STATEMENT OF COMPLIANCE

The recommendations are made further to advice from the Monitoring Officer and the Section 151 Officer has confirmed that they do not incur unlawful expenditure. They are also compliant with equality legislation and an equality analysis and impact assessment has been considered. The recommendations reflect the core principles of good governance set out in the Council's Code of Corporate Governance.

12. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

All Declarations of Interest of any Executive Member consulted and note of any dispensation granted by the Chief Executive will be recorded in the Summary of Decisions published on the day following the meeting.

VERSION:	1
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CONTACT OFFICER:	Martin Kelly
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DATE:	13 November 2019
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BACKGROUND PAPER:	
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