

Leigh Town Board

10.00 am, 22 November 2024

Present at the meeting

Karen Cox (Chair), Spinning Gate Shopping Centre Manager

Jo Platt, MP for Leigh

Councillor Yvonne Klieve, Lead Member for District Centres & Night Time Economy

Dorothy Bowker, Founder and Trustee – The Bridge

Steven Tomlinson, Director – Nemiah and Leigh Means Business

Alex Grundy - Owner - Café Stella

Maxine Mealy, Wigan & Leigh College – Vice Principal (substituting for Alison Rushton)

Apologies:

Councillor Dane Anderton, Portfolio Holder for Police, Crime and Civil Contingencies

Adele Adjetej, Senior Policy and Partnerships Officer

Danny O'Neil – Greater Manchester Police

Lloyd Jolley, Director – WJ Structures Ltd

David Proctor, Assistant Director – Planning and Regeneration

In Attendance:

Paul Blinkhorn Constituency Support Officer

Melanie Lamb, Service Manager – Regeneration

Stuart Hurst, Project Manager – Regeneration

Nick Clarke, Service Manager – Planning & Transportation Policy

Joanne Berry, Leigh Town Centre Manager

1. Welcome - attendance and apologies

The Chair opened the meeting, welcoming all Board members and introductions were provided.

The Chair gave formal congratulations to Dorothy Bowker on behalf of all the Board for her 'Believe Star' which was awarded to her and her husband Frank jointly in recognition of their work for the community on 29th October. This is the highest accolade awarded to a resident of the Borough and very well deserved!

2. Minutes and actions from last meeting

The Chair confirmed the minutes from the last meeting and thanked Board members for their suggestions on composition of the board following the last Board meeting.

3. LTPT: Budget Announcement

Service Manager – Regeneration gave an overview of the Budget announcement in relation to Long Term Plan for Towns initiative. The accountable body has received confirmation the funding will continue with extended timelines. A further £200k capacity funding will be made available from April 2025, to further develop and strengthen the draft Plan and build on work undertaken. Project delivery will now take place from April 2026. The government are expected to adjust the programme themes to ensure they align well with the Government's strategic objectives. The news that the fund will continue was noted as very positive. The detailed guidance from government will be keenly awaited to enable detailed planning on next steps.

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Jo Platt MP stated that the £200k capacity funding will be made available in the spring but noted that this may come from the total funding pot and may not be extra funding. The Government has listened to feedback from Town Boards regarding confusion of different pots of funding. Government is considering bringing everything together as one funding pot to stop confusion in the future.

4. Wigan Borough Local Plan – draft Leigh Town Centre Policy

The Board considered a verbal update and presentation, provided by Service Manager – Planning & Transportation Policy about the draft Wigan Borough Local Plan and specifically the draft Leigh Town Centre Policy. This will be the new development plan for the borough to 2040 and will sit under the Places for Everyone Plan. The plan will be ambitious for the future of the borough and include both future development and conservation.

Concerns were raised by multiple board members on the disruption caused by the St Helen's Road Active Travel Scheme and the impact on local businesses.

Jo Platt MP said that the preoccupation with cycle lanes is not working for Leigh, and that more attention should instead be being given to improving Leigh's public transport and on local road infrastructure.

Service Manager – Planning & Transportation Policy accepted this point and noted that there has been some progress to improve public transport. The recent bus franchising gives greater public control on bus fares, routes and timetabling and a review of the bus network is currently underway. Recently the V1 bus service has been extended to run 24 hours, a new Middlebrook bus route has been introduced.

Steven Tomlinson, Director – Nemiah and Leigh Means Business raised the issue of the scale of commuting out of Leigh each day. Noting the need for talent retention and attracting businesses with wealth back in the town centre. The potential for the policy to be more explicit about economic growth was queried. It was also noted that low land values are causing an issue with buildings being used for storage rather than more productive uses.

Jo Platt MP suggested that the Board is well placed to lobby for improving transport infrastructure and ensuring that alternatives are in place and noted the importance of cross-boundary with neighbouring authorities to achieve this.

Action:- Service Manager – Planning & Transportation Policy asked Board members for feedback on the draft Leigh Town Centre Policy by 6 December 2024.

5. Communications Strategy

The Chair updated members on the communication strategy. It is intended that the strategy will help clear up confusion associated with different funding streams and wider projects taking place in Leigh. Engagement with the marketing team at Wigan and Leigh College will give students the opportunity to create a brand for the Leigh Town Board. A skeleton scope for a Communications Strategy is being put together by secretariat to be discussed at the next meeting.

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The Chair gave a verbal report to the Board on the importance of marketing and brand awareness for the Board, and the need to develop a Communication Strategy. There needs to be effective communication with businesses and residents of Leigh, to clarify the role of the board and negate confusion over involvement in other funding schemes currently in place (St Helens Road project & Levelling Up project).

The Chair updated the Board regarding engagement with community and voluntary sector and her commitment to meet with as many of these organisations as possible.

Action:- The Chair will update the Board at the next meeting.

Action:- The Chair invited suggestions and feedback on the development of a communication sub-group and youth sub-group.

6. Future of Composition of the Board

The Chair noted that Board members had been invited to consider the current Board composition and consider and propose membership where current sector gaps exist (such as health, faith, and sports sectors). The Chair thanked the Board members for the suggestions made so far and asked for any further comments/feedback.

Action:- All Board members to consider and feedback thoughts to the Chair and Secretariat team.

7. Overview of Constituents' Representations

Jo Platt MP raised concerns that the community warden safety patrols in the town centre are not working effectively. It was noted that the community wardens currently cover a 1pm to 8pm shift. Businesses on Bradshawgate have reported issues with rough sleepers while opening in a morning.

Leigh Town Centre Manager acknowledged this feedback and stated the firm that manage the community wardens are flexible with how they operate, and it would be possible to implement a mix of shifts as a trial. The Chair added that the current system is still in its infancy & there will be minor adjustments required

Jo Platt MP asked if a trip to Stockport would be possible to find out more information on how they have transformed their night time economy.

Action:- Town Centre Manager to seek to vary shift times of community wardens.

Action:- Secretariat to arrange visit to Stockport.

The Constituency Support Officer informed Board that there is an organised litter pick on Thursday 28 November, starting at Jo Platt MP's office on Bradshawgate.

Action:- All Board members are invited to take part.

The Constituency Support Officer queried the progress of the Leigh Shopfronts Scheme funded through the Levelling Up Fund (further update to a previous Board

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meeting) and whether there is scope for Board members to be involved/briefed on the evaluation of expression of interest applications.

Service Manager - Regeneration noted that the Expression of Interest deadline is 30 November, and a large number of applications are expected. The project team will be compiling and appraising submissions during December. The project team remain keen to brief the Board on the appraisal process and emerging recommendations and this could take place at the Board's January meeting subject to Chair's agreement.

8. Reflections on the meeting

The Chair invited Board Members to feedback any reflections that they had on the meeting including meeting location and frequency of meetings. There was no feedback from Board members.

9. Any other business

The Chair thanked all Board members for their continued support and for the work they are doing for the town. The Chair encouraged all Board members to continue to promote their positive news stories to help change negative perceptions of the town.

The Chair informed all members that the Board meeting in December is cancelled. This is as the new government guidance is still awaited and is not anticipated to arrive in time for the meeting.

Alex Grundy - Owner - Café Stella asked has there been progression on a Police base in the town centre. The importance of visible policing was recognised.

The Chair shared concern with the board over the potential closure of Leigh Post Office and B&Q. Jo Platt MP advised that a petition has been organised on the potential closure of Leigh Post Office which would have a detrimental impact on the town.

Action:- Jo Platts office to share the petition with the board.

The Service Manager – Regeneration, provided a verbal update in relation to Leigh Market refurbishment scheme. It was noted that a recent press article reflected that Council officers and members of the project team met with Trader Representatives to provide an update on the scheme and next steps. This included that the market would need to be relocated during the refurbishment works and that the project team would be working closely with traders in the new year to find the most suitable option and to shape the design proposals for the refurbishment of the market hall.

Jo Platt MP stressed the need for full and thorough discussion and consultation with the traders at Leigh Market about the future plans.

At the request of Jo Platt MP, the secretariat has prepared a draft letter from the Board to TfGM in support of the expansion of the Metrolink to Leigh.

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As the meeting had overrun against agenda timings, any Members able to join the Chair to walk through the town centre were invited to do so, but the formal Item 10 'Walk Around Leigh Town Centre' was postponed until the next meeting.

The meeting concluded at 11:50am